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The Church and Major Scobie

By A. A. DeVitis

EVERYONE who has read Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* in one way or another has become aware of the critical furor occasioned by the religious issues arising from the suicide of the hero, Major Scobie. Evelyn Waugh, a Catholic novelist of Greene's own stature, wrote in *The Commonweal* upon publication of *The Heart of the Matter*, "To me the idea of willing my own damnation for the love of God is either a very loose poetical expression or a mad blasphemy, for the God who accepted that sacrifice could be neither just nor lovable." But it is not the purpose here to paraphrase those critics who for various reasons have accused Greene of being everything from a Manichaeist to an Existentialist. Many readers of *The Heart of the Matter* have made the serious error of attempting to abstract from its pages Greene's personal philosophy or religious belief. Insisting on a prerogative of philosophical and theological speculation, critics and "fans" alike have failed to recognize that in his serious novels Greene creates an experience of life which is not representative of a religious bias but of a "condition humaine." Considering his position as a Catholic writer, Greene says of himself in a letter to Elizabeth Bowen published in *Why Do I Write?*:

If I may be personal, I belong to a group, the Catholic Church, which would present me with grave problems as a writer if I were not saved by my disloyalty . . . There are leaders of the Church who regard literature as a means to an end, edification. That end may be of the highest value, of far higher value than literature, but it belongs to a different world. Literature has nothing to do with edification. I am not arguing that literature is amoral, but that it presents a personal moral, and the personal morality of an individual is seldom identical with the morality of the group to which he belongs. You remember the black and white squares of Bishop Blougram's chess board. As a novelist, I must be allowed to write from the point of view of the black square as well as of the white: doubt and even denial must be given their chance of self-expression, or how is one freer than the Leningrad group?

One is reminded of Henry James's urgent plea to a friend that he not finish an anecdote, for in it James found the germ of a story and foreknowledge of the ending might have encouraged him to influence the actions of his characters.

The point to consider in a discussion of *The Heart of the Matter* is not why Greene uses a religious theme but how; it is important to decide whether or not his use of a religious theme invalidates the novel as a work of art. And to do so Greene must be considered as a novelist who is a Catholic, not as a

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dilettante of religion and theology, or as he puts it himself in his essay on the religious aspect of Henry James, "a philosopher or religious teacher of the second rank." Then the problem of whether Major Scobie is "saved" or not according to the teachings of the Catholic Church becomes an unimportant consideration in the novel which presents a personal moral—Scobie's moral—which may not coincide with that of orthodox Catholicism. It is Scobie's struggle with himself and with the God of the Catholic Church that forms the basis of the conflict: Scobie's pity for suffering humanity forces him to suicide, the sin of despair. And according to the Church, this is damnation. Yet as Greene's ablest critic, Kenneth Allott, points out, "Discussion of the meaning of *The Heart of the Matter* is doomed in advance to sterility if it does not take into account that the words composing the book have been organized primarily with an artistic, rather than a philosophical or theological, intention." But it is equally wrong to minimize the importance of the religious theme as Allott does, for it is the frame of reference within which the narrative develops. Neglecting the spiritual conflict within Scobie reduces the novel to a structural *tour de force*; Allott does not appreciate fully the intense spiritual drama which is the novel's reason for being. He diminishes the aspect of recognition and the theme of betrayal, interwoven with Scobie's intense love of God, which are fundamental to the comprehension of the book. It is more nearly correct to accept Scobie's Catholicism as something akin to the Fatality of Greek drama.

For Major Scobie, as for Arthur Rowe, the hero of *The Ministry of Fear*, pity is the keynote of human existence: "What an absurd thing it was to expect happiness in a world so full of misery . . . If one knew, he wondered, the facts, would one have to feel pity even for the planets? If one reached what they called the heart of the matter?" The imagery of the novel corresponds to the intensity of the pity and formulates the mood. References to rusty handcuffs, broken rosaries (side by side in Scobie's desk), swollen pye-dogs, joints of meat, cannon fodder, all eventually resolve themselves into an overwhelming sense of decay. The broken rosary and the rusty handcuffs become symbolical of divine justice as opposed to human justice. Scobie stands in relationship to his sphere as God to His. The vulture hovers over Scobie implying not the terror of death, as it did for the whiskey priest in *The Power and the Glory*, but the terror of life and the remoteness of death: "Couldn't the test of man have been carried out in fewer years? Couldn't we have committed our first major sin at seven, have ruined ourselves for love or hate at ten, have clutched at redemption on a fifteen-year-old death-bed?" The setting of the novel, West Africa, allows for this kind of imaginative painting. The rain and the steam, the atabrine-yellow faces, the gangrenous flesh, all indicate a languor and ennui which may allow for an explosion of any kind. There is an implicit tension, for the reader is ever conscious of the war through the hostility that exists between

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the English sector and Vichy French sector across the river. The sense of history and the threat of violence are neatly compressed, as in classical drama, into the relationships that exist among a few people. The individual struggle is of first importance; the imagery and the setting form a portion of that Necessity which propels Scobie on his quest of recognition. The dramatic construction of plot accommodates the inevitability of the catastrophe.

A middle-aged police officer in British West Africa, Major Scobie, "the member of an awkward squad, who had no opportunity to break the more serious military rules," is passed over for promotion. His wife Louise, for whom he feels only pity and responsibility, urges him to allow her to go to South Africa, where she may escape the malice of her "friends," for a holiday. To avoid making her unhappy, Scobie borrows from Yusef, a merchant suspected of diamond smuggling by Wilson, the British agent who fancies himself in love with Louise. It is suggested that Yusef is the evil aspect of Scobie, and indeed he becomes the tool of Necessity.

A torpedoed ship brings Helen Rolt into the pattern of Scobie's unhappiness. He sees her carried on shore, after forty days in an open boat, clutching her stamp album like a child. And he falls in love with her because she is pathetic: "Against the beautiful and the successful, one can wage a pitiless war, but against the unattractive: then the millstone weighs on the breast." The situation builds up into the eternal triangle; it is a credit to Greene's artistry that he is able to pour heady wine into such an old barrel. Scobie soon realizes that his love for Helen is only another facet of his pity. He realizes that Helen is Louise and Louise is Helen, that he is equally responsible for the happiness of both: "Pity smoldered like decay at his heart . . . He knew from experience how passion died and how love went, but pity always stayed. The conditions of life nurtured it." After an argument he writes Helen a note: "*I love you more than myself, more than my wife, more than God I think.*" The note falls into the hands of Yusef, who blackmails Scobie into smuggling diamonds for him.

When Louise returns from South Africa, Wilson blurts out that Scobie and Helen are lovers. To see whether or not he has given up his mistress, Louise insists that Scobie accompany her to Communion. How simple it would be, he thinks, if he could withdraw his pity from Helen, repent his sin in the confessional, and free himself of responsibility. But he is too honest to pretend a repentance he does not feel. The confessor, Father Rank, is merely an intermediary and Scobie knows that his brief rests with God; and he will not add hypocrisy to his other sins. He knows that he must crucify either God or Louise. The suffering of God, however, is unreal, remote; that of Louise is nearer him—he can feel her pain, and Helen's. He chooses sacrilege and damnation: "O God, I offer my damnation up to you. Take it. Use it for them."

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With the sacrilege comes the commissionership that Louise has so long coveted. Now of the devil's party, Scobie knows that he will go from "damned success to damned success"; he indulges in the bitter jest. With the smuggling of the diamonds comes the realization that he is "one of those whom people pity," and the further awareness that his corruption corrupts others. He tacitly agrees to the murder of his boy Ali by one of Yusef's killers. He knows that he has destroyed to keep from bringing hurt to either Helen or Louise, and he determines to set them free of him. He reasons that if he kills himself he will stop crucifying God; it is God whom he loves above all things:

... O God, I am the only guilty one because I've known the answers all the time. I've preferred to give you pain rather than give pain to Helen or my wife because I can't observe your suffering. I can only imagine it. But there are no limits to what I can do to you—or them. I can't desert either of them while I am alive, but I can die and remove myself—from their blood stream. They are ill with me. I can't go on, month after month, insulting you. I can't face coming up to the altar at Christmas—your birthday feast—and taking your body and blood for the sake of a lie. I can't do that. You'll be better off if you lose me once and for all.

He will hurt God once and for all, deprive God of himself as he will deprive himself of God. A voice within tempts him to virtue as to sin: "You say you love me, and yet you'll do this to me—rob me of you forever. I made you with love . . . And now you push me away, you put me out of your reach." Scobie answers, "I don't trust you. I love you, but I've never trusted you. If you made me, you made this feeling of responsibility that I've carried like a sack of bricks." This is Scobie's sin: he prefers to trust himself, in his limited knowledge of love, before God who is all love; he cannot put his faith in trust of God, for his faith is love and pity its image. Scobie cannot comprehend the "appalling" nature of the mercy of God. He knows that the choice for damnation is his alone as he drinks the narcotic. He hears someone calling for him, a cry of distress; automatically he stirs himself to act. Aloud he says, "Dear God, I love . . ."

At the end of the novel Father Rank returns to give comfort to the living, to re-establish the norm of the Church and to give hope for Scobie's soul. "The Church knows all the rules," he says, "But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart." He insists that if Louise has forgiven Scobie, then God can be no less forgiving. Louise remarks that Scobie really loved no one but God, and the reader remembers how often Scobie had been struck by the truth of her perceptions.

The Heart of the Matter takes its epigraph from Péguy: "Le pécheur est au cœur même de chrétienté . . . Nul n'est aussi compétent que le pécheur en matière de chrétienté. Nul, si se n'est le saint." Major Scobie's pity, his love,

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becomes indicative of a universal love; it is in matters of trust that he fails. In the process of learning the wherewithal of his religion, he realizes the immensity of human love, but he fails to recognize the immensity of the mercy of God. His pride and his humility conspire against him, and because he cannot trust the God he loves, he commits the sin of despair. In matters of his religion he has become competent, for according to Greene the sinner is very close to God.

In an interesting essay published in *Transformation Three*, Martin C. D'Arcy discusses the anatomy of the hero within a Christian context:

In the Christian scale of values the hero is not easily distinguishable from the saint; it is more a matter of emphasis than of division. The saint cannot be canonized unless he can be shown to have practiced heroic virtues; the man of heroic deeds cannot be called a hero unless there is evidence that his inner spirit corresponds with his deeds, and that his motives are pure. But whereas in using the word saint, the emphasis is on a man's relation to God and his spiritual work for his fellow man, it is prowess and self-sacrifice for others, for friends or a nation, which is uppermost in our thought of the hero.

D'Arcy goes on to point out what Cecil Day Lewis in *A Hope for Poetry* and Rex Warner in *The Cult of Power* had pointed out: that the social organism has grown to such a size that it has complicated man's relationship with the other life, and that man has come to associate his limitations with the state. The potentiality of tragic action in either the classical or the Elizabethan sense is limited because the individual no longer finds means to battle so complex and bewildering an organism. It is something of this problem that Kafka dramatizes in his works, particularly *The Trial* and *The Castle*. Such "heroes" as Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* and Joe Keller in *All My Sons* and, more recently, the airman in *The Deep Blue Sea* become at best pitiful characters. However, if the frame of reference within which the character moves is defined, if the antagonist is shown to be a noble one, and if the protagonist has some idea of the force he opposes and why he opposes it, then the possibility for heroism is no longer limited. The hero can be as tragic as he was in Greek drama or in Elizabethan tragedy.

This is, I think, the case with Scobie. He knows his antagonist and he recognizes his strength. What he cannot accept is the orthodox Roman Catholic conception of God. For Scobie suffering and love are irreconcilable. He cannot fathom a God who seems not to love those whom he has created, a God who has not the same sense of pity and responsibility as himself. Scobie can love infinite goodness, but he cannot trust it since it allows unreasonable anguish. And in *The Heart of the Matter* Greene's daring is incredible: he pits the individual against God; Scobie is at once a traitor, a scapegoat, and a hero, for his sense of pity is merely an image of his love for God. This pity assumes the

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proportions of a tragic flaw; it is incontestable that he suffers more than he deserves, and whether or not he is damned becomes unimportant in a consideration of his heroism. Yusef becomes Necessity, for he makes the tragedy inevitable, and Catholicism hangs over the novel like the Fatality of Greek drama. Pity and fear are aroused in the reader, and Greene wisely leaves the issue of damnation open at the end. What is important is that Scobie by pleading for humanity opposes God and is defeated, and his pity, in excess, makes him a truly tragic figure. The reference to *Othello*, furthermore, appears in the novel for a very good reason. When Yusef, the evil that is in Scobie, says, " 'I am the base Indian,' " Scobie realizes that his integrity, the pearl worth all his tribe, has been bartered for the happiness of Helen and Louise. He makes the mistake of thinking that he can arrange the happiness of others, but he knows in his heart that "no one can arrange another's happiness," for experience has taught him this. Like Othello, Scobie loves not wisely but too well. The human entanglement in which he finds himself admits only one solution—suicide. To discuss whether or not Othello is damned is absurd, but Greene invites such discussion when he pits Scobie against God. One hopes that both Scobie and Othello are, at worst, in a special limbo reserved for literary heroes.

In the light of this conflict with God, it is necessary to accept the religious theme as that to which all other considerations are secondary. It is precisely because Scobie's hero depends so strongly on a Roman Catholic frame of reference that Father Rank cannot be dismissed as the mere plot contrivance that Kenneth Allott considers him. Father Rank must attempt to restore the norm of the Church; its doctrines must be presented as flexible enough to accommodate heroic action. " 'The Church knows all the rules,' " he says, " 'But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart.' " His presence is indispensable to the plan of the novel, for Greene's use of the dramatic technique in the construction of plot demands that someone restore balance and order in the world after the passions of men have spent themselves. At the end of *Othello*, Lodovico re-establishes law on the island of Cyprus and returns to Venice to relate with heavy heart the heavy deed that loads the tragic bed.

But the analogy must not be pressed too far. The contexts within which the two dramas occur are quite alien. Othello is a man of noble deeds because his society has fostered such nobility. Scobie is a little man who becomes capable of heroism because of a sense of pity. Like Prometheus he chooses to defy God.

The Penny World of T. S. Eliot

By David W. Evans

AMONG the many titles to which T. S. Eliot, the Grand Cham of twentieth-century literature, may more or less legitimately lay claim is that of preserver of tradition, and one of the traditions which he has seen fit to preserve in his own work concerns the status of children or what might be called the importance of growing up. Children and the lives of children became of interest to European letters some time after Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote *Emile*. Until then, with the occasional exception of a Chaucerian martyr like Hugh of Lincoln or Shakespeare's princes in the Tower, children might almost have been thought not to exist. *Emile* altered this situation by directing the attention of the literate world to the child as an individual, with the rights and privileges of an individual, and in some ways the modern world has never quite recovered from the staggering implications of this novel idea. At any rate, Rousseau was followed by Wordsworth with whom the child became father to the man, and with Wordsworth the tradition was not merely established; it had become entrenched. It had become a cult.

The phenomenon of "child sentiment," as William Empson describes it in his essay on Lewis Carroll in *Some Versions of Pastoral*, postulates a faith in children. The child "has not yet been put wrong by civilization" and, since "no way of building up character, no intellectual system," has been able to develop "all that is inherent in the human spirit," the child represents "more . . . than any man has been able to keep." The popularity of this idea in Romantic and Victorian literature derived at least in part, Empson thinks, from the fact that in a world which "made it hard to be an artist," writers "kept a sort of tap-root going down to their experience as children."

When he expressed these sentiments, Empson was endeavoring, not without violence, to fit the unoffending author of *Alice in Wonderland* to the dimensions of a sort of Procrustean psychoanalytic couch, and it is true, of course, that Freudian applications of the theory of child sentiment might be found aplenty in the work of T. S. Eliot. The desperate diplomat, for instance, in "Difficulties of a Statesman," with his forlorn wail of "O mother/What shall I cry?" certainly seems to be yearning for a return to the womb. The idea of child sentiment, however, can be considered in quite unsubtle terms with none of the dark and turgid overtones of psychoanalysis; it is usually in this way that Eliot, the preserver of tradition, has carried forward the tradition in his poetry. Children, indeed, might almost be said to play a decisive role in his work, and the attempt to recover the peculiar charm of the private world of the very young is one of his quietly persistent recurring themes.

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The idea is stated most clearly, perhaps, in *The Family Reunion*, Eliot's modernized version of the tragedy of the house of Atreus. At one point in that play, Harry, the tormented and hag-ridden hero, discusses with Mary, his boyhood sweetheart, his own strictly supervised childhood, a time when the "only memory of freedom" was "a hollow tree in a wood by the river." The tree became "the block house/ From which we fought the Indians" and "the cave where we met by moonlight/ To raise the evil spirits." The tree was cut down later by the adults who "lived in another world," and in its place was erected "a neat summer-house . . . 'to please the children.'" The nostalgic quality of such reminiscences as these echoes repeatedly through Eliot's poetry, appearing and reappearing like the minor leitmotifs of Wagnerian music. The excited voices of children "hidden in the foliage" at Burnt Norton, for instance, combine with the delighted cries of children half a world away, children playing with a swing in an apple tree in the New Hampshire "Landscape." These voices suggest a basic attitude, a feeling that somehow the mere fact of childhood conveys a sense of enchantment to the author; this is so even when, muted and somewhat melancholy, to be sure, they are heard again in *The Confidential Clerk* as Lucasta tells Colby, the "clerk," about her childhood—when she was "only eight years old . . . / But . . . old enough to remember . . . too much." It is so even in the desolation of *The Waste Land*:

. . . when we were children, staying at the archduke's
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.

One of Eliot's most pointed and poignant recollections of growing up is contained in the Ariel poem "Animula." Eliot has had relatively little to say about Wordsworth, and yet "Animula" bears in some parts of its structure what seems to be striking evidence of the influence of that first great hymn to the "natural superiority of children," the ode on "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." The child in Eliot's poem who moves "between the legs of tables and of chairs,/ Rising or falling, grasping at kisses and toys," who is

Content with playing-cards and kings and queens,
What the fairies do and what the servants say,

is a small descendent of Wordsworth's "six years' darling of a pigmy size," busy with "some little plan or chart,/ Some fragment from his dream of human life." To both the years must bring "the inevitable yoke"—the "heavy burden of the growing soul." On both will lie the "earthly freight" of "custom . . . with a weight,/ Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!" Resemblance ceases here, for in the wake of the Napoleonic holocaust Wordsworth could still find comfort in the "Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves," while no such easy

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optimism was possible for Eliot, at least in the period of "l'entre deux guerres." In "Animula" there remains only desperate and disconsolate prayer for Guiterriez, and Boudin, and Floret, "For this one . . ./And that one"

ELIOT has had a varied reputation as a poet. When "A Cooking Egg" was published in the first issue of the little magazine *Coterie* in May 1919, he was known, if at all, as the poet of the slick, the scintillating, and the urbane macabre. To suggest that any connection could exist between such a poet and the sentimentality of the Wordsworthian "We Are Seven" attitude, for instance, would have been to invite ridicule. That the appearance of the poem coincided nicely, and perhaps not entirely by accident, with the Easter season, a time for eggs and for children, attracted no special comment, and the poem took its place in the volume of *Poems* (1920) as one more example of Eliot's *vers de société*, a not unworthy companion to the sophisticated "Burbank with a Baedeker" and "Sweeney Among the Nightingales." Its epigraph from Villon inspired the portrait of a young man, old at thirty, morally and spiritually bankrupt, one to whom life might seem as unpalatable as a cooking egg, an egg not quite fresh. A tissue of ironic contrasts, the poem suggested that such a young man might well be viewing the present with disgust, the past with regret. Like all of Eliot's poems, however, it presented problems, although the child as hero did not seem to be one of them. Readers were disturbed, for instance, by the abrupt transition to the center section in which the speaker discourses in semi-cynical fashion on Honour, Capital, and Society. Did the ellipses separating this section from the beginning and the end of the poem indicate a lapse of time? And what of the climactic and portentous cry about "the penny world I bought/To eat with Pipit behind the screen . . ." ? What was the "penny world," and what did it signify? Who, for that matter, was Pipit? In her intricately detailed surroundings, under daguerreotypes of aged relatives and the "Invitation to the Dance," she did not sit, but "sate," with her knitting and her copy of *Views of the Oxford Colleges* beside her, invested with mystery, enigmatic as a Mona Lisa, one of the most elusive heroines in twentieth-century literature.

Part of the veil seemed to lift when, in 1926, I. A. Richards published his famous essay on Eliot's poetry, the essay which gave currency to the proposition that Eliot's work represented a "music of ideas," which argued against the necessity of seeking "an intellectual scheme" in the poetry, and which stressed the need of responding to it emotionally, as one responds to music. Richards solved the mystery of Pipit's identity, for himself, by describing her as the "narrator's retired nurse," still treasuring after a dozen years the copy of *Views* which he had sent her "when he went up to the university."

The Principles of Literary Criticism, to which the article on Eliot was ap-

pended, became, like *The Sacred Wood*, a classic of modern criticism, and perhaps the enormous authority of Richards' name precluded the need for contradicting this portrait of Pipit. At any rate, no attempt was made to do so until F. O. Matthiessen published *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* in 1935. Matthiessen, one of the more trustworthy Virgils for the wanderer in Eliot's Inferno, differed with Richards on several points. He did not believe in the necessity of skipping back and forth in time, for instance, in order to explain the *Views*. The book was merely one of the "accurately observed details" helping to establish Pipit in her environment, an environment of child-like innocence as opposed to the sophisticated and decadent world from which the speaker had come. Matthiessen thought that Pipit's name "might suggest that she is a little girl." He was prompted to this belief in part by the episode of the screen, but with some ingenuity he cited also Ruskin's now famous letter, a letter written in middle life about a little girl, which exhibits an intriguing correspondence to the center section of "A Cooking Egg." In discussing what he will not want, or want for, in heaven, Eliot's hero, who expects to be trafficking with Sir Philip Sydney, Coriolanus, and others, says with conviction that he will not want Pipit there. In the letter quoted by Matthiessen, the aging Ruskin wrote, presumably in a spirit of humorous pique, that little "Rosie" need not think he would care one whit about her in heaven: he would be too busy seeking the company of "Pythagorus and Socrates and Valerius Publicola."

In both Richards and Matthiessen, the virginal quality of Pipit, whether old nurse or little girl, was implicit. "A Cooking Egg" if nothing else was unsullied by sex. To be sure, an ugly rumor that she might just possibly be the hero's mistress had apparently circulated, for Richards, according to Matthiessen, took pains to squelch it. Pipit sits "upright" and "some distance" away from her visitor: "obviously she can't be the poet's mistress," and Matthiessen agreed wholeheartedly. The archaism of her sitting, moreover, presumably enforced the impression of propriety.

SO matters stood for almost twenty years, or until F. W. Bateson, one of England's livelier critics, upset the idyllic state of affairs and precipitated a controversy which, even in the thermonuclear age, had all the dimensions of a small war. In an article on the responsibilities of the critic for *Essays in Criticism*, the magazine of which he is editor, Bateson casually took exception to the views of both Richards and of Matthiessen regarding Eliot's "Egg." He totally rejected Richards' analysis as an example of gross misreading and presumed irresponsibility and undertook to provide in its place a new reading of the poem, an ominous new reading. Observing Coleridge's dictum that every detail in a good poem must justify itself, he applied to "A Cooking Egg" what he called the "principle of the contextual check," by which he meant that

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"to determine what is in the poem and what is not we can only appeal to the poem's context (verbal, literary, intellectual, and social)." On this basis he found in the poem no old nurse and no little girl. He discovered, instead, the most frightening implications of class-consciousness. He saw Pipit as "a sort of Bloomsbury *demi-vierge*, dull but decidedly upper middle class," with whom the narrator was carrying on "a tepid flirtation." The *Views* then became a memento of "a cultural pilgrimage to Oxford," the "Invitation to the Dance," "a printed invitation to a charity ball." No lapse of years occurred between the opening and the scene behind the screen, but the "penny world" epitomized in "a brilliant objective correlative the shabby second-rate lives that Pipit and the narrator have been living," and the "cheap meals . . . shared behind a restaurant screen" became "structurally essential," suggested both by the screen and the later mention of the ABC's. In short, "an episode that can be symbolized by [a cooking egg] must be cheap and . . . even . . . shameful."

Needless to say, the editor was inundated with correspondence, most of which concerned Pipit's reputation rather than his original thesis about the function of criticism. A symposium in *Essays* for July 1953 explored the whole matter of "A Cooking Egg" from a variety of angles with inconclusive results. E. M. W. Tillyard hewed to the Matthiessen line by dismissing the old nurse theory and declaring flatly that the narrator and Pipit were "children together." Although Richards later chided him for displaying "a Kenneth Grahame view of childhood," Tillyard was convinced that "the secrecy and intimacy" of the moment behind the screen "exclude people of different ages. . . ." Elizabeth Drew, on the other hand, injected a piquant note to the effect that Eliot himself had once advised Richards to look for the secret of "A Cooking Egg" in the earlier poem, "Dans le Restaurant." One of Eliot's experiments in French, this poem centers on an aging waiter who tries to entertain a somewhat fastidious customer with an account of a sexual experience (at the age of seven, it should be noted) with a little French girl, an amorous encounter which was rudely interrupted by the appearance of "un gros chien." Eliot's hint, Miss Drew assumed, indicated that the two poems were linked by, to put it delicately, "un instant de puissance et de délire." The suggestion that Sex might be lurking behind the screen in "A Cooking Egg" undoubtedly lent weight to Bateson's argument, and, like that of Lady Teazle in *The School for Scandal*, Pipit's reputation seemed to tremble in the balance. In fairness to Pipit, however, it should be pointed out that the heroine in Sheridan's play was quite innocently involved with a screen, and Eliot's hint to Richards need not have had reference to the sexual implications in either poem but merely to the fact that the principals in each case were children.

Bateson tried to close the controversy with a summary of new correspondence in his October issue, but in January 1954, Richards returned to the fray

and, with the editor, took part in a discussion hopefully entitled: " 'A Cooking Egg': Final Scramble." Neither of the opponents had retreated an inch from his original position, and both were apparently prepared to fight it out on this line if it took all summer. Bateson still found "social innuendoes" in the poem but no children. For him, "an 'affair' of some sort" was "the likeliest solution." Richards, on the other hand, indicated that he had described Pipit as a nurse although he knew that other interpretations were possible. He still felt, however, that the hero of the poem was "looking back a long way to a time when something a penny could buy could be all the world to him, and Pipit then," whoever she might be, "was a participant." The "penny world" was a vital part of the poem, in fact, "its turning point." But he would not grant that this world could represent "either a cheap meal in a restaurant or 'shabby second rate lives.'" This would "spoil" the poem for him, although as evidence for his feeling he could only point to the "movement of the lines."

IN a dubious battle of such Miltonic proportions perhaps no compromise is possible. If Richards is right, conviction must seem to lie in something more substantial than the "movement of the lines." On the other hand, Bateson's attempt to equate the "penny world" with the world in which the hero is living, a world of "red-eyed scavengers" and "weeping multitudes," is equally suspect insofar as it tends to neutralize the shock value of the closing lines and reduce the work to a flatness void of contrast.

Something, too, about the tawdry love affair which the editor professed to find seems to violate the spirit of the poem—in spite of the "red-eyed scavengers"—and perhaps this is what Richards felt. That life is "birth, and copulation, and death" is not an unfamiliar theme in Eliot's poetry, especially the early poetry, but it is not his only theme; and that "A Cooking Egg" does involve a remembrance of childhood, rather than a sex intrigue or an excursion into social values, derives support from at least two factors not mentioned in the debate.

For one thing, as in "Animula," at least an intimation of Wordsworth's "Intimations" can be seen in "A Cooking Egg." This may not vindicate Richards, but it lends weight to the impression of the poem provided by Tillyard and to Matthiessen's theory of innocence, and it serves to counter the slightly suggestive atmosphere which Bateson's interpretation seems to imply. For at the moment when the poet regrets the loss of the "penny world," the world of "the eagles and the trumpets," he is saying in richly compressed effect what Wordsworth said:

There was a time when . . .
 . . . every common sight
 To me did seem
 Apparelled in celestial light,

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The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore; —

What follows in "A Cooking Egg" intensifies the bitterness of the contrast. The "eagles and the trumpets," which are the "glory and the dream," have been supplanted by the dreary reality of a world which is less than ideal, a world given over to "red-eyed scavengers" and "weeping multitudes."

Secondly, there remains the physical object which the "penny world" represents, "something a penny could buy," as Richards has said, which "could be all the world" to its owner. In a very special sense, Eliot is addicted to the writing of occasional poems. The occasion for the so-called Ariel poems, for instance, was Christmas, and for *Ash Wednesday*, Lent. "Gerontion," "East Coker," and "A Cooking Egg," on the other hand, were occasioned to a greater or lesser degree by the season of Easter. At Easter, in a less inflated age, almost any child could buy for a penny a decorated egg, a spun-sugar candy egg, which through a peephole in its end allowed a glimpse into a hollowed center and a fabulous child's world, alive with color and enchantment. This was a treasure not to be eaten at once but only after many "Ohs" and "Ahs" to be shared with the best ally in some secret place, and whether that place was behind a screen or in a cave near the river was not really important. It was far from the eyes of the elders who "lived in another world." In a poem of violent contrasts, the "penny world" provides, in short, the most telling of ironic contrasts—a contrast with the title.

This survey has taken a circuitous route to reach the conclusion that "A Cooking Egg" owes something to the tradition of child sentiment, and such a conclusion, unhappily, will effect no compromise between Richards and the editor of *Essays in Criticism*. Richards would disapprove, not because it supports Tillyard in his "Kenneth Grahame view of childhood," but because it imposes upon the poem "something which does not belong," yet another scaffolding to impede the "movement of the lines." Bateson, on the other hand, would almost certainly insist that to wander thus promiscuously from the totality of the poet's work to the text and back again is grievous violation of "the principle of the contextual check." In an age of formal criticism, the unforgivable sin is to depart from the text.

No poet, however, can divorce himself entirely from his milieu or pretend that his work is not, in some sense, a part of all that he has been. The interest in children and childhood reflected in Eliot's work is of this sort, a thread which contributes to the design of the whole tapestry and to its color spun from the flax of experience. Thus, it is apt to appear quite casually, at odd and unexpected moments, as in *The Cocktail Party*, for instance, where both of the leading women see the hero at different times in the guise of a small boy. To his erstwhile mistress, Celia, he seems "Like a child . . . /Lost in a forest want-

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ing to go home." His wife, on the other hand, and perhaps with more truth, sees him as a much-made-over child, a child who was always being measured "to see how much he had grown," but a child, nevertheless, who perhaps was only a "real" person when he was a child.

Where children are concerned, then, Eliot has preserved in his poetry the essential pattern of a tradition that prevailed with some regularity in nineteenth-century literature from Wordsworth to Lewis Carroll, which molded the creation of a whole gallery of children in Dickens, and which found expression in our own literature in the Mississippi childhood of Huckleberry Finn. That tradition embodied a vision of a world infallible and secure, a golden and enchanted world, a world whose inhabitants, at one with Nature and not yet preoccupied with "getting and spending," were gifted with an intuition not vouchsafed to their sophisticated elders, possessed of more, as Empson would say, "than any man has been able to keep." Chimerical, of course, it is a vision of escape, but on the whole a pleasant vision, and one which to some degree is cherished by most of us rather more than we would care to admit.

Charles Péguy's Rise to Fame

BY HANS A. SCHMITT

ACCORDING to his own views, expressed variously on the eve of the First World War, Charles Péguy had, at the age of forty-one, produced in his poem *Ève* "the most considerable work . . . in Christendom since the 14th century." He had found his own clear path to salvation, without succumbing to the habitual orthodoxy of the *bien-pensant* Catholic, and he had for almost thirteen years, as editor of the *Cahiers de la quinzaine*, occupied "from the moral point of view, the highest situation and position in Paris." Though few contemporaries saw in Péguy quite the genius that was reflected in these estimates, his rise to fame was rapid. Rewards of a substantial nature came to him as early as 1909 when he was in his middle thirties. In part, at least, this was due to his ability to inspire undying loyalty in some and unqualified distaste in others. ". . . among us in the *cour rose*," wrote Jérôme and Jean Tharaud, fellow students at the École Normale Supérieure, which Péguy attended from 1894 to 1896, "he was incontestably the first. By nature he was the center of our group." Another, to the contrary, objected even at that early stage in their lives to Péguy's "spiritual authoritarianism" which was "truly shocking" and "frankly revolting." These divided judgments were to be representative of the emphatic manner in which friend and foe viewed him during the decade which saw Péguy's rise from obscurity to fame.

Charles Péguy was a self-made man. Neither influence nor protection of any substantial sort smoothed his path to fame. His play *Jeanne d'Arc*, published under the pseudonym Pierre Baudouin in 1897 at his own expense, sold one copy. The friendly *Revue Socialiste* alone took note of its publication with a summary of its contents. His *Marcel, Premier Dialogue de la cité harmonieuse* (1898) attracted no attention whatsoever.

The founding of the *Cahiers de la quinzaine* in 1900 led to no drastic changes in Péguy's fortunes. Despite his quarrel with the leadership of the newly constituted SFIO—France's united Socialist party—the magazine *Mouvement socialiste* commented favorably on the venture and urged "our comrades" to subscribe to it. But by 1902 the break with his former political associates seems to have been complete, and Péguy and his *Cahiers* were now wholly without publicity for several years. In 1904 Daniel Halévy drew attention to Péguy's *Zangwill*, which was an attack on the historical school of literary criticism, but his remarks appeared in the *Pages libres*, an obscure review which in 1909 ended its brief existence by merging with the *Grande Revue*. The Swiss-French novelist, Édouard Rod, in a long essay on the social role of the intellectual, identified Péguy in 1907, for the readers of the *Revue*

Hebdomadaire, as part of the anti-intellectual reaction of the post-Dreyfus era. Significantly, both of these brief mentions deal with Péguy's assault on the contemporary intellectual scene. His great encounter with Pascal in *De la Grippe* (1900), his great discourse on poverty and misery — *De Jean Coste* (1902), — to say nothing of *Jeanne d'Arc* (1897), and the rousing call to arms that was *Notre Patrie* (1905), all these seem to have been read by no one but the subscribers of the *Cahiers de la quinzaine*, and perhaps many times not even by them.

The task of introducing Péguy to a larger public fell to Maurice Barrès. The Lorrainer, whose patriotic novels were popular and whose views found favor equally among the voters of the first district of Paris and the "immortals" of the French Academy, first met Péguy in 1906 at the house of his cousin, Charles Lucas de Peslouän, who had been Péguy's fellow student at the Lycée Ste. Barbe. He had read *Notre Patrie*, and was ready to welcome the former Socialist to the nationalist ranks. Barrès' interest in Péguy was purely political. He never admired him as a writer. But praise from Barrès, no matter how qualified, was powerful advertising. In an interview with the *Echo de Paris* in 1909 the academician invited those who believed that French literature was decadent to visit the office of the *Cahiers de la quinzaine*. There they would meet "sturdy Frenchmen who yesterday were fighting along with Picquart and Jaurès and who are now turning with disgust from the Dreyfus party. Péguy and his friends represent the forces of tradition which have always been part of our historical development." Once again Péguy was brought before the public as a reactionary, this time in a manner and through a medium far more effective than those used by Halévy and Rod, and in a far more uncompromising form. For Barrès concluded his remarks by placing side by side Péguy's *équipe* and the *Action Française* of Charles Maurras. "The beauty of a Péguy and of a Maurras lies in their devotion, not to success but to their idea."

A few months later, Marcel Drouin — André Gide's brother-in-law, writing under the nom de plume of Michel Arnauld — published the first critical evaluation of Péguy as an author in the *Nouvelle revue française*. The article followed a strikingly barren period in Péguy's life. Except for *A nos amis, à nos abonnés* (1909), in which Péguy explained the aims and the current financial predicaments of the *Cahiers*, he had not written or published a word for almost two years. The mysteries and the great self-revelatory pamphlets were yet to come. *Jeanne d'Arc*, on the other hand, was outside Drouin's purview, perhaps even unknown to him, for he carefully confined himself to the writings which had appeared in the *Cahiers de la quinzaine*.

Arnauld provided a broader view of Péguy. He saw in him an idealist, but he was the first to object to Barrès' conclusion that his political position had shifted to the right. He predicted that another Dreyfus affair would find him

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again on the side of the Dreyfusards. He would never abandon the people for the aristocracy. Any reactionary hailing him as a convert to his cause would be disappointed. Arnauld gave a plastic picture of the verbal tidal waves with which Péguy engulfed the unsuspecting reader. They were irresistible, the product of impulse, not of calculation. Péguy had no intention of dazzling or overpowering the reader with an irrelevant display of words. In contrast to French literary tradition, which demanded from the artist a product finished in every detail, Péguy consciously strove to reproduce the impression of work in progress. Not content to have his say he insisted on adding the Hows and the Whys and the Wherefores that set his thoughts in motion. Without making a drastic value judgment, the critic insisted that the results were impressive, and that Péguy must be read.

Arnauld's views found an echo outside the small coterie of the NRF. Daniel Halévy summarized them for the readers of *Le Temps*, adding the interesting claim that there was in 1909 not a writer, critic, or editor in Paris who did not know Péguy's name and who had not read his works.

This raises the question of the extent of Péguy's fame and following at this point. Halévy took it for granted that he needed introducing to the readers of a great daily paper. What evidence is there elsewhere that he was well-known in literary and editorial circles? To begin with, and thanks to the presence of Georges Sorel, Péguy's editorial open house at the office of the *Cahiers* on Thursday afternoon enjoyed a certain reputation. Henri-Alain Fournier, working on his *Grand Meaulnes*, was in 1909 beginning to seek out Péguy and to fall under the spell of his ideas. The introduction of Péguy's name into the small circle of the *Nouvelle revue française* meant direct contact with André Gide and Jacques Copeau, who in turn counted among their friends such notables as Francis Jammes and Emil Verhaeren among the older, and Paul Claudel and Henri Ghéon among the younger generation. Then there was Romain Rolland, now approaching the end of his famous and formidable *Jean-Christophe*, whose prestige may have aided Péguy as much among the cosmopolitans as that of Barrès did in the circle of the nationalists. The name of Rolland brings to mind another type of reward which brought a certain amount of fame to the editor of the *Cahiers de la quinzaine*. The *Cahiers*, since 1905, had been associated with the publication of a number of successful works. Rolland's own first volume of *Jean-Christophe* was crowned with the Prix de la Vie Heureuse. The Prix Goncourt went to Jérôme and Jean Tharaud's *Dingley, l'illustre écrivain* in 1906 and in 1907 to Emile Moselly's *Le rouet d'ivoire*. One may, therefore, agree with Halévy to the extent of assuming that by 1909 Péguy was well known as an editor. The appearance of the *Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc* at the end of that year was to bring him fame and public acclaim as a writer.

HALEVY recalls how one day in December, 1909, he met Péguy at the door of his office. "Péguy unbuttoned his long great coat and took out of the inner pocket the freshly printed *Cabier* . . . ; I read the title: *Le Mystère de la charité de Jeanne d'Arc*."

The subject was popular just then. Ever since the appearance of Quicherat's *Procès de condamnation et de réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc* in 1841, there had been an upsurge of interest in the Maid of Orleans which grew with the approach of 1912, the 500th anniversary of her birth. At the same time the literary form which Péguy employed was at last becoming respectable in France. The *Mystère de la charité de Jeanne d'Arc* was written in free verse, which had been introduced into France by a number of poets of foreign origin, among whom the American Francis Viélé-Griffin, and the Greek, Jean Moréas, are perhaps best known. It is an interesting coincidence, furthermore, that the first complete translation of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* appeared in the same year as the *Mystère*, although there is no evidence that Péguy was acquainted with the work of the American master.

The popularity of the subject renders it all the more remarkable that of all the poetry and prose generated by the interest in Joan of Arc in the quarter-century before her canonization in 1920, only Péguy's *Mystère* aroused a stir comparable to that created by Anatole France's *Vie de Jeanne d'Arc* (1908). The 2,000 copies of the *Cabiers* sold out at once, and another edition was promptly prepared by the publisher Plon. This success at the "box office" was reflected in the critical columns of the daily and periodical press.

Péguy liked to talk of the "dix-sept gaillards" who launched his first great poem. But this was an over-simplification. On the one hand there were more than seventeen reviews; on the other, fewer than seventeen were favorable. Catholic commentators especially received the evident rapprochement between the former socialist and the Church with much reserve. Some found his theology suspect. Others felt that a poet who spoke of the damned as "suffering in vain" was far from having crossed the bridge that led to salvation. Only one — a Jesuit — would at least concede that Péguy had reached the first way station. None of the major Catholic reviewers considered the work as a literary triumph. "He who will have patience to read it will finish by yielding to the 'vertu' which emanates from it," wrote Léonce de Grandmaison in *Les Etudes*, while Édouard Trogan advised the readers of France's oldest periodical, *Le Correspondant*, that the charm of *Le Mystère de la charité de Jeanne d'Arc* "develops but slowly like a subtle perfume." Yet "after M. Anatole France" whose Joan had scandalized the Church, "M. Charles Péguy provides more than consolation. He gives us hope."

Maurice Barrès likewise refused to be swept off his feet by Péguy's poetic eloquence. He praised the *Mystère* as a major contribution to the current

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traditional revolt. But the sensitive aesthete Barrès recoiled from the anarchic and garrulous peasant-girl Joan, the Christianity of whose creator he felt to be "capable of immense disorders." Péguy's heroine, he pointed out, took a long time to get to the point, and as he was wading through the turgid, long-winded text, Barrès confessed to drawing his watch in impatience more than once. He concluded his review with the most cruel blow of all: he admonished Péguy to devote some of the time he was now spending on the perfection of his morals to the perfection of his style.

Georges Guy-Grand, on the other hand, one of the staunch defenders of the theory and practice of the Third Republic, reflected the suspicion with which anti-clericals viewed the *Mystère*. He considered Péguy's populism a pose and refused to take much stock in his presumed return to tradition. The *Cabiers de la quinzaine*, he wrote in the *Annales de la jeunesse laïque*, were a dispensary of anarchy under many disguises. There was the suspicious presence of the father of syndicalism, Georges Sorel, who was, however, merely one of many "apostles of disorder" whose worshippers gathered at Péguy's *boutique*. Among them Guy-Grand singled out at random Romain Rolland, Leo Tolstoy, Count Gobineau, Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson. Péguy was conceded the distinction of being the only true "libertaire impénitent" of his time, but his work left Guy-Grand cold, while his anti-intellectualism repelled him.

Péguy's friends were as strangely assorted as his critics. The political right hailed *Le mystère de la charité de Jeanne d'Arc* as evidence of a notable conversion. Barrès' faint praise notwithstanding, Édouard Drumont, famous and notorious as author of *La France juive* and as editor of the hypernationalist *La libre parole*, described Péguy's Joan as the creation of a man who had erred, but who had now returned to the patriotism of his forefathers. Georges Sorel likewise greeted the *Mystère* as an outstanding document of France's current patriotic revival. He took pains to point out that Péguy's choice of subject was no concession to the public taste, but a spontaneous confession of faith in France.

The young conservatives of Péguy's own generation, some of whom had known him since his days at the Lycée Ste. Barbe, saw him in a different light, of course. Jérôme and Jean Tharaud explained that Péguy was no convert either in religion or in politics. They remembered that his interest in Joan of Arc dated back to his adolescence. Another *Barbiste*, Paul Acker, whose own preoccupation with the phenomenon of political conversion had just found expression in the best-selling novel *Le Soldat Bernard*, considered Péguy's latest work the fruit of two decades of reverent study of the life of France's greatest heroine. Both as a mystic, who could hear her voices, and as an independent soul experiencing her loneliness, the editor of the *Cabiers de la quinzaine* had seen her as a symbolic parallel to his own life.

A staunch republican like Maurice Reclus would naturally disparage the importance of this spectacular *Cabier* as a turning point in the development of its author. This young man, the biographer of Jules Favre, whom Péguy had first met at the board of Jacques Maritain's mother, saw in the *Mystère* a serious but not necessarily permanent lapse into reaction. He admitted that neither socialists nor republicans had ever praised Péguy as bountifully as had Catholics and conservatives following the appearance of his latest work. But Reclus insisted that the Péguy claimed by the *Echo de Paris*, *La libre parole* and the *Action Française* was not the Péguy whom he knew and admired. The nationalists, it seemed to him, had arbitrarily selected from his latest book what suited their purpose. They had extracted fragments suited to the fashioning of a chauvinistic pamphlet. They had neither affection nor understanding for the whole.

Joseph Lotte, another young friend, was the only Catholic who gave unstinted praise to the *Mystère*. Likewise an alumnus of the Lycée Ste. Barbe, Lotte, now a schoolteacher at Coutances and — thanks to Péguy — a recent convert to Catholicism, heaped such superlatives on the latest creation of his mentor that some citizens of the town, upon reading his effusion in the local gazette, questioned the mental equilibrium of the reviewer. Lotte, however, had a simple prescription for the dubious. He urged them to cast aside all notions of literary propriety once they opened a *Cabier* of Péguy's. Within the plain yellow covers, he assured them, they would find a divinely inspired message whose importance relegated aesthetic considerations to the realm of triviality. Pressed by revelation the author thought and wrote unconventionally. God was his guide and his defense.

Friend and foe alike overlooked the fact that *Le mystère de la charité de Jeanne d'Arc* might qualify not only as a declaration of faith or a lapse from enlightenment, but also as a work of art. Only two reviewers concerned themselves with the poem *sub specie artis*.

André Gide described his reading of the *Mystère* as a poetic revelation of such blinding intensity that it made him oblivious to the world around him. Of the major critics of the day only Paul Souday praised the authenticity and originality of Péguy the poet. Unlike many of his colleagues, he did not think Péguy's style contrived, but rather assessed it as the natural and accurate reflection of the poet's thought processes.

Péguy reacted to this flood of publicity with understandable delight. He overlooked the strictures of Barrès with uncharacteristic equanimity. Reclus' concern over his defection from republicanism did not deter him from hailing his critique the "very best ever written on a work of mine." Only Guy-Grand had to suffer for his temerity by being attacked in a subsequent *Cabier* as a

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second-rate scribbler, motivated by anger over Péguy's refusal to publish one of his manuscripts.

These differences of opinion as to the import and meaning of Péguy's latest work appear much more significant to the retrospective observer, of course. In our own day Péguy has been claimed by a variety of groups ranging from the Communist party to the *Action Française*. A study of the critical reception accorded *Le mystère de la charité de Jeanne d'Arc* reveals a similarly "split" appeal. To some he was the ever faithful son of the Republic; to others he symbolized the spiritual resurrection of French tradition. This division, furthermore, was as marked among his friends as it was among his enemies; it was pronounced on the right and it appeared on the left. As early as 1909 a variety of cults began to take it upon themselves to explain the "true" Péguy. But in the first flush of success such portents of future complications were naturally overlooked.

THE success of *Le mystère de la charité de Jeanne d'Arc* resulted in the preparation of a Péguy-anthology by Bernard Grasset: *Œuvres choisies: 1900-1910*. Begun in 1909, and published in 1911, the volume was compiled and edited by Péguy himself. All excerpts were from the *Cahiers*, arranged topically rather than chronologically. A substantial part of the anthology consisted of selections from the *Mystère*.

On this occasion the critics were more lavish with praise and condemnation. An old *communard* like Maxime Vuillaume, whose *Cahiers rouges* were then being published by Péguy, hailed it as a major literary monument. Pierre Mille, another contributor to the *Cahiers*, praised his "royal style." A third, Félicien Challaye, thought that this venture undertaken by a publisher of Grasset's prominence reflected great and deserved credit on the thirty-eight year old author. On the other hand Jean Pierrefeu, the editor of *L'Opinion* saw in the *Œuvres choisies* conclusive evidence of the deterioration of Péguy's talent. More acidly, Jean de Gourmont wrote in the *Mercure de France* that he had "perhaps never read a more wearisome and irritating book," while the historian Ch. V. Langlois professed to be revolted by the long shapeless essays "without head or tail," Péguy's taste for alliterations, and his "typographic puerilities well known to psychiatrists." The author, in Langlois' opinion, belonged in a category with Charles Louis-Phillipe and George Bernard Shaw, whose writings should be read not for pleasure but to provide a salutary warning of the dangers threatening civilization.

None of these strictures seemed capable of halting Péguy's march to fame and even fortune. In the same year Maurice Barrès pressed his candidacy for the French Academy's Grand Prix Littéraire, just established to challenge the Prix Goncourt as France's most distinguished literary award. Péguy's chief

competitor was his own choicest client — Romain Rolland — who had been entered in the competition during an absence from France by Langlois' mentor, Ernest Lavisse, and Péguy's old socialist adversary, Lucien Herr. It was almost a family affair since both men were considered for works — the *Mystère* and *Jean Christophe* — which had first appeared in the *Cahiers de la quinzaine*, and like a contest between friends it ended in a draw. After four ballots neither candidate received an absolute majority and the committee decided to postpone the award, but granted Péguy the Prix Estrade-Delcros of 8,000 francs.

This was a partial defeat, but Péguy took it in good spirits. He expressed his gratification for the substitute honor, while his friend Joseph Lotte praised the good judgment of the Academy. The secretary of that distinguished body explained that it had made the award because, thanks to Péguy, Jeanne d'Arc, the liberator of medieval France, had been resurrected to liberate the souls of yet another generation of Frenchmen.

At the end of 1911 Péguy's fame seemed established. The question is: How firmly? In 1909 he had written: "I am unknown . . . the path I have chosen will cause me to remain unknown. I am being absolutely ignored and I shall pursue the path of obscurity until my death." The next two years had confounded his pessimism. But the winner of the Prix Estrade-Delcros was even now not a happy man. "Alas when strength declines, glory comes," he wrote Romain Rolland on September 17, 1911. Glory had come, but Péguy had not the capacity to enjoy it. Therefore, it forced no concessions from him, either. Public and critic had praised his work, but to a man of his independence that was only as it should be. In Péguy's opinion great men deserved recognition and the right to go their own way. In his world the concept of public relations did not exist. In return he was soon to experience once more the hurt of utter public rejection, the tragic return to obscurity in his later life.

Review-Articles

From Authentic Artists

Talking Bronco. By Roy Campbell. Regnery. \$2.50.

In the Rose of Time: Poems, 1931-1956. By Robert Fitzgerald. New Directions. \$3.00

The Mentor Book of Religious Verse. Edited by Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska. New American Library. \$.50.

THE talking bronco has died, by an irony of Providence, in an automobile accident: a violent death concluding a reckless life. This brief book of poems, the final one to be issued during Roy Campbell's life by his American publisher, becomes an unintended memorial, a pleasant volume to handle but a disconcerting one to read. Issued after the volume of selected poems, which was the basis of an essay by this writer in *Renaissance* (Spring 1956), *Talking Bronco* comes as an anticlimax. Herein at least one poem, the translation by Campbell of San Juan de la Cruz's *En una Noche Oscura*, receives its third book publication in this country within a decade. The explanation is that the volume was published in London in 1946; nevertheless it is a surprise to come upon poems that were earlier printed in America in the *Selected Poems*.

Still, let us be grateful for the belated publication and for the fact that toward the end of his life Roy Campbell was acquiring a new group of readers in America, younger people than those who had first become acquainted with the poet of "Tristan da Cunha" and *The Flaming Terrapin*. Here and now it is impossible to rank him among the poets of his time. The old canards have not yet died: against the evidence, Richard Eberhart wrote last year that "Campbell on the basis of his writings can be accused of fascism" and that we may take "exception to his Fascist attitudes." Of course any man can be accused of Fascism, but making the charge stick is something else again; and while it is true that Campbell and Mussolini shared a desire to see General Franco win the Spanish Civil War, the same desire was shared by many thousands of voting Americans, Democrats and Republicans, Catholics and non-Catholics—all vocally anti-Fascist and all quite outside the lunatic fringe of political activity. Note that Eberhart does not himself accuse Campbell of Fascism and does not specify just what Fascist attitudes of Campbell we must, as good Americans, take exception to. This kind of writing is not a suitable surrogate for literary book reviewing and literary criticism, and one hopes its ethics will have been called into question by the time the literary histories of the Twenties and Thirties and Forties are written.

Let us remember Roy Campbell as a satirist and as a lyric poet. For himself he seems to have favored the raucous, ferocious humor that we read in "The Sentry's Reply to the Poet" and some lines of "The Clock in Spain":

Big Ben proclaimed, through mists of grime,
The surly fascism of Time,
And all the small Benitos, then,
Would cuckoo, tinkle, chirp, or chime
Their orders to the race of men.

In this poem, written in 1939, Campbell is pejoratively comparing the liberalism of England, Italian Fascism, and Spanish and Russian Marxism, and is contrasting all three materialist attitudes to that of traditional Spain: Latin, sensuous, loving of leisure and beauty. Further, he compares the patriotism of this Spain with the similar patriotism of an older England and cites himself as a man of this England. Far from being Fascist, Campbell's beliefs are closely analogous to those of such divergent writers as Ford Madox Ford and T. S. Eliot. What is striking about the utterance in "The Clock in Spain" and its companion poems—companion in time and theme—is the poet's preservation of a surly kind of good humor in the midst of his polemic. In contrast, the hatred expressed in the writings of the Left on the Spanish conflict was dead earnest.

This ferocity is essential to the wit of such a poem as "Reflections," with its Campbellesque fusion of mock pastoral, almost squalid realism, and surrealist fantasy. But Campbell's poem differs from those of Eliot, such as *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Waste Land*, not only in the neo-classical rigidity of its quatrains but precisely in the moral quality of ferocity that I have just cited. Too, one somehow feels that Campbell was not following the fashion set by Laforgue and Eliot but that he would have written anyway as he did write.

As a lyric poet Campbell is less happily exhibited in *Talking Bronco*. "Luis de Camoes" and "San Juan de la Cruz" are sonnets that exemplify the poet's hyperbole, a strength in "Tristan da Cunha" but a weakness in these brief lyrics. Eberhart wrote of Campbell that "As a nonmystical worldling he has always blown hard.") Perhaps the finest and the most widely known of the lyric poems here is "The Skull in the Desert," a piece of sufficient length to contain without bursting at the seams such a figure as "Foaled by the apocalypse" and many like images. But even "The Skull in the Desert" is impaired by the final stanza, with its imprecise and tasteless juxtapositions.

This final volume, then, reveals much of the old force but some things, too, of doubtful value; yet Roy Campbell continued in *Talking Bronco* to create his world, and whether appalled or approving, readers now and to come must reckon with that fact, the hallmark of the authentic artist.

Robert Fitzgerald's collected poems, *In the Rose of Time*, are the result of twenty-five years of devotion to his art. Three sections cull what the poet believes to be the best of his work, from his first volume entitled *Poems* (1935), *A Wreath for the Sea* (1944), and a third group of hitherto uncollected poems, work of the previous decade or so.

Other (and, alas, earlier) reviews have commented on the technical achievement of these poems and on their sincerity. Certainly one of the most interesting aspects of Robert Fitzgerald's technique is his ability to achieve a classical purity of rhythm and phrasing while making use of jargon and slang:

The vacuum roars in the press rooms,
And the soft announcer's voice clips
Into a beating music.
By rivers, under footlighted cities,
The compact locomotives jostle
Luminous, loud in the night;
The wings of roaring funfighters

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Waggle in grey cloud-hung squadrons:
Combustive music, power beyond power,
Rending and rest for the heart.

We note the tendency in these lines to use a softer beat, to evade strongly accenting given syllables, to group sounds by syncope; the result is to make the meter unobtrusive, a flowing vehicle for the images of the poem. The vocabulary is equally self-conscious in its use of the terms of our technological culture and in the placing of words. "Vacuum," "locomotives," "funfighters," "squadrons"—these words occur almost in quotation. Such is the precision of their meaning and position in the poem that they have the quality of symbols rather than that of mere examples to illustrate an idea. Equally careful is the Miltonic—or Virgilian?—placing of "Luminous"; and the final two lines consist of a typically classical grammatical device, a summarizing series of phrases without the structure of a sentence but with all the power of a sentence, an absolute construction. We find such effects in other poems—"The Shore of Life," "History," "Park Avenue," "South Side," "Counselors," to name some. A painstakingly impersonal quality characterizes most of the poems; the poet describes as objectively as he can, without intruding into the field of the reader's awareness yet all the while retaining control over the material and the technique of the poem, as in "Horae":

It pales. As if a look,
Invisible, came in the east.
In some far vale a rooster
Expels his cry of life.

We note that the poet directs our attention by two comparisons—"As if a look,/Invisible" and "Expels his cry of life." But he does not introduce himself into the picture we are given; and this reticence, this air of impersonality, contributes to the pervading classical tone of the poems. Especially in such a poem as "The Imprisoned" this Eliotean device gives the work authority, for we seem to hear the poet saying to us, "This is the way life is, take it or leave it; I am simply presenting you with a group of representative vignettes that are related each to the other by the thread of truth, not by my special pleading." At other times, however, the modern instances have the effect of raisins in a cake of classicism. Or it may be that this impression comes from reading too many of the poems at a sitting.

Robert Fitzgerald has constructed his poems with great care and with a profound knowledge of prosody; he invariably seems to be aware of what he is about. The high polish and the suavity of his work perhaps rob it of some quantity of force and passion, but at the same time, his poems never contain the bathetic or tasteless figures and lines of a Roy Campbell. He is one of the most accomplished translators of our age of outstanding translations. His versions of Villon's "*Ballade des Pendus*" and a Horatian ode (1,25) exemplify his ability; moreover they are excellent when read simply as original English poems without reference to their French and Latin originals. Attracted as he is to the life of the modern metropolis, Fitzgerald is one of the more distinguished poets among those who since Baudelaire have tried to encompass within their poetry the juxtaposed complexity of men and machines, beauty and sordidness that composes a Paris or a London, a Berlin or a New York:

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And evening vast and clean above the city
Washed the high storeys with sea-light, with a silken
Sky-tint on the planes and embrasures:
The clump of crags and glitter sinking eastward
With the slow world, the shadow-lipping shores,
Pale after-conflagration of the air.

Occasionally a poem praises

the plains come to adore the mountain wall,
Their yellow fields running and bowing like waves,
but mostly the poet, exacerbated though he is by

Madmen smooth as ice, sagacious men,
Succeeders and sycophantic men, Petronians,
Flash-bulb boy friends, storkclub habitués,
Iniquitous ascetic men, good fellows,
Levantine family men, Americans,
White men and fashionable wedding men,
Peter Stuyvesant men of mellowness,
Long Island men with lawns, Republicans,

celebrates the city, whether he sees the "lavish cars" moving along the Charles River "westward in an eddy and dance of shadow" or

A long curve between factory windows,
Blackened fences, cindery yards.

Reticent as Robert Fitzgerald is in his poems, he does not write of his personal beliefs in many confessional poems. Images garnered from the lore and practices of the poet's Catholicism often occur in the poems, as in "Manuscript with Illumination," but only in the rare piece—"Evening Prayer" and "*Solstitium Saeculare*"—does the poet directly bear witness to his religious belief

And bless God's will in each;
And bless His word of gold

As far as heart can reach,
Turning the Apostle's page
Or Thomas, who would teach

Peace to the heart's rage.

Even here the poet is meditative rather than assertive or polemic. Yet behind the entire poetry of *In the Rose of Time* lies the poet's religious struggle, to escape the chaos he came from and to harbor in "the stillness of this place" through the grace of God. Of that struggle and that odyssey these poems are movingly evocative.

The Mentor Book of Religious Verse has been compiled and edited by the editor of an earlier collection of the same kind. Apparently undeterred by Graham Greene's satirical references to Gregory's earlier compilation, *The Triumph of Life*, he and Mrs. Gregory have come up with a similar anthology, admitting that "To make a selection of religious verse has never been as simple a task as it may seem." First of all, their choices are personal rather than representative, and their anthology has been compiled deliberately to exclude, "as far as possible, the choices made by other anthologists," because "too frequent a

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repetition of the same poems in various anthologies dulls the attention of the reader to the poem—and dulls the spirit."

Second, their definition of the word "religious" involves some discussion of "metaphysical," "mysticism," and "transcendentalism." What is a religious poem? "Although this selection is nonsectarian, we have assumed that the word implies—since the verse is in English—divine inspiration as it is known in the Hebraic-Christian world," with the addition of a few poems indicating "the survivals of Paganism within the Christian psyche." Such is the editorial reply to this prime question. Their discussion of metaphysical poetry as religious poetry need not occupy us in the present review, but their brief discussion of mysticism in relation to religious poetry merits comment. They write that "we have associated mysticism with the singular, direct communications that may take place between a human being and God. The vision of human contact with divine sources, though brief, is often within the province of poetic experience." Still, "the term is too broad to define our selection of religious verse." As for transcendentalism, as used by Emerson it embraced "all unchurched religious faiths, so as to enter a globular paradise, which included Buddhism as well as Christianity, where all the distinctions of pluralism were dissolved in recognition of a universal Godhead"; today the word in the United States is less specifically "religious than philosophical," and we may suppose that transcendentalism need not worry us further in our inspection of the anthology.

Now this writer pretends to no theological expertise beyond that of any other graduate of a Catholic college, and furthermore he admits that one man's anthology is another man's poison. The editors have every right to make a personal rather than a representative selection if they want to do so; no one will argue that they should not follow their own criteria; and the result of their labors is that *The Mentor Book of Religious Verse* will give pleasure to many readers. It is, from the standpoint of aesthetic quality, the most fastidiously selected anthology of the kind yet to be published in this country; no contemporary American anthology of religious verse even faintly compares with it.

The job, however, could and should have been accomplished with a distinction that, as things stand, it lacks. Edifying as the poems included are by both intention and execution, their religious content itself is debatable, occasionally dubious, and even nonexistent. The unsophisticated reader may easily go astray reading this anthology, as its professedly nonsectarian criteria smack of religious relativism, even an indifference toward problems not only real and existing but basic to the essence of Christianity. These are serious allegations, and I shall proceed to back them up.

What seems fundamentally wrong with the Gregorys' criteria is not that they cannot recognize an authentic poem or an authentic religious poem or even an authentic Christian or Jewish poem. It is that they fail to stick to the workable definition that they have set up for the selection of poems written according to their standards: a poem that implies divine inspiration as it is known in the Judaeo-Christian world. I wonder whether the editors have a clear notion of what they mean by "divine inspiration." As any Catholic schoolboy knows, the divine inspiration of the Bible is different from that of all other literature, and even within the Testaments themselves inspiration is a problem to be decided book by book. How much more fallible is the "divine" inspiration of the poet! It would seem to be impossible to approach this problem of the divine

inspiration of literature, even of religious literature, on a nonsectarian level and achieve an agreed solution; for to the Catholic the religious poem, however harmonious its form and however correct its apprehension of dogma, lacks the objective inerrancy of Holy Writ. The personal vision of a saint or a poet possesses validity to the extent that it does not conflict with the legacy of the Bible and the teachings of Holy Mother Church. Generally speaking, the Protestant holds that Scripture is divinely inspired but that its correct interpretation depends on the degree to which its individual reader too is divinely inspired; it is in this sense that the Protestant poet must be inspired—as Milton prayed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit—in order to write a true as well as a beautiful religious poem, and his personal vision is the standard of its own validity, not the teachings of the Church. The results of the Protestant attitude are that each personal vision assumes the quality of divine inspiration that Catholics see in Scripture and that the poet's work is a kind of Bible with, for him, the sanctions of the Bible. Beyond these results, we find ourselves becoming concerned with form rather than content in the poem and tending to equate the poet's sincerity with a statement of truth.

It seems to me that Gregory's definition of what the religious poem is has validity but that his understanding of his own terms is woolly. His understanding of the formal necessity is both generous and subtle; not so of the dogmatic necessity. He states the limits of his selections, the extent to which they are "furthest from the center": D. H. Lawrence's "The Man of Tyre," Marianne Moore's "Sun" ("which is well within the orbit of her staunchly Protestant, Presbyterian belief"—a curious statement in view of the great number of figurative and of Protestant poems in the anthology), Thomas Hardy's "The Blinded Bird," and a section from Ezra Pound's Canto LXXXI. Thomas Hardy's and Marianne Moore's poems are Christian in the fullest sense; Lawrence's and Pound's are Christian in no sense. Pound's "Pull down thy vanity" passage is many things—a moral lesson, certainly—but one of the things it is not is a religious poem. Lawrence's poem is religious in a Laurentian fashion—it preaches pantheism, religious relativism, monotheism, and pluralism all at once and with fervent sincerity.

What is the anthology like? Most of the poems are patently Christian in dogma, imagery, and intention. The editors have arranged them in a sequence of the Christian year, from "New Year's Day to the feast of Christmas in December," but naturally without following "a strict chronology" so that some play is given in the editorial placing of certain pieces and groups of poems. So far so good. But the reader is brought up short by James Joyce's "Ecce Puer," which is not religious in any sense; the title is a pun on *Ecce Homo*, but that pun is as close to divine inspiration, even in the broad sense of Gregory's introduction, as the poem gets. Its final two lines are an allusion to Christ's "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," but the application is purely secular. Again, the reader is brought up short when he comes to John Clare's "Eternity of Nature," a brief poem that succinctly and tellingly deals with the myth of the eternal return:

All nature has a feeling: woods, fields, brooks
 Are life eternal; and in silence they
 Speak happiness beyond the reach of books;
 There's nothing mortal in them; their decay

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Is the green life of change; to pass away
And come again in blooms revived.

Its birth was heaven, eternal is its stay
And with the sun and moon shall still abide
Beneath their day and night and heaven wide.

This is but one of a goodly number of poems that are religious but that do not abide by the terms of the editorial definition, so that even within the wide limits set, the reader is misled. Emerson's "Worship" and Lawrence's "The Man of Tyre" are other examples of this lapse. A third group of poems consists of pieces about religion but not themselves religious, such as the selection from Robinson Jeffers' "Two Christmas Cards," in which the poet adjures us merely to "Seek the magic of past time" but not to take more drastic steps. Gregory has, moreover, not dealt with the difficult and delicate question of the dramatic monologue. Is, for example, Yeats's "Crazy Jane on God" an expression of religious belief, or is it the poet's expression of a dramatic situation involving that belief? Crazy Jane is a mask with a given personality, but she is not Yeats, who occasionally did write Christian poems but was not a Christian. (A difficult but fairly popular feat with poets nowadays.) Similar examples are Gonzalo's "Song" from Auden's version of *The Tempest* and Jessica's speech, "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!" from *The Merchant of Venice*. To sum up, this *Mentor Book of Religious Verse* includes poems that are not religious in any sense, poems that are not religious according to the editors' definition, and poems that are about religion, i.e., that contain religious images or that deal with religious subjects, but that do not express the poet's own involvement with Judaeo-Christian belief.

It is an ungrateful task to criticize thus adversely a book consisting of poems most of which one likes very much. But in what possible sense, pray, can C. F. MacIntyre's version of Rilke's "Torso of an Archaic Apollo" be said to be divinely inspired in the "Hebraic-Christian tradition" any more than, say, Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"? Why omit one and include the other by the standards of selection if those standards permit the inclusion of the Rilke poem? Equally excellent translations have been made of poems by Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, poems about the content of which the editors can have made no cavil. Why were these writers not represented? And how could even a very personal standard of selection with a positively Pickwickian notion of what religion in general and the Christian religion in particular are about have omitted poems by Allen Tate, Norman Nicholson, Charlotte Mew, Kathleen Raine, Elinor Wylie, Léonie Adams, David Jones, or Patrick Kavanagh, among twentieth-century poets?

This *Mentor* anthology nevertheless gives pleasure as a whole and on many pages heightens pleasure by fusing it with edification. At the very least, for the first time editors of a collection of religious verse have set standards of artistic refinement as requisites for inclusion in their anthology, and however incomplete and even subversive of true religion some of the selections may be, not a single poem in the book is a pietistic desecration of art. The editors have made a beginning, have set standards where none existed or at any rate were abided by. Editors of future anthologies of religious poetry will not be able to ignore *The Mentor Book of Religious Verse*.

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Agonies and Anesthetics

Sound of a Distant Horn. By Sven Stolpe. Sheed and Ward. \$3.95.

Thin Ice. By Compton Mackenzie. Putnam. \$3.50.

The Lively Arts of Sister Gervaise. By John L. Bonn. Kenedy. \$3.50.

The Angel in the Corner. By Monica Dickens. Coward-McCann. \$3.75.

The Threshing Floor. By John Coyne. Putnam. \$3.95.

TO BE a Catholic writer today is fashionable, a fact which has earned at times highly questionable laurels for writers familiar with the outward and visible signs of Catholic dogma and with the intellectualizing of the Church fathers. Few would-be modern Catholics have had either the courage or the insight to cope with that aspect of Catholic truth which distinguishes the Church from very nearly all other modern institutions, namely the consideration of death and its inevitable association with His agony. "Catholic" novels have offered the faith as a happiness pill, as a retirement plan, as a theological puzzle; they seldom offer Catholicism in one of its most effective roles: a way to die. Though few moderns have conveyed effectively a faith that death can be "a good thing," the writer who does realize the need for suffering and for death as a part of the Divine plan places his work in a firm tradition two thousand years old.

Sound of a Distant Horn is a first novel by a young Swedish convert. It is based upon death and redemption and is the most thoroughly Catholic novel this reviewer has read in many years. In the sense of plot the story is simple. Kansdorf, an expatriate writer in Paris, is dying of cancer. He has a medical friend, Lebrun, a rather insecure agnostic, who offers to ease his agony by euthanasia. On his deathbed Kansdorf is visited by Fr. Perezcaballero, whose vanity once made him the Billy Graham of France and whose resultant remorse almost killed him of despair. The book is not clinical. Indeed, all that is definitely known of Kansdorf's cancer is that it is in his abdomen. Still none of the anguish of the deathbed is deleted. But the focus of the narrative is on Kansdorf's need to attain grace rather than on his concern with death. What the death finally accomplishes dramatically is the demonstration of Kansdorf's grace and his acceptance of his suffering. At the death Lebrun is profoundly moved, the implication being that he, too, will not listen to the truths he has refused within himself. Fr. Perezcaballero, not present at the death but influenced by Kansdorf earlier, is saved through his realization of the purity of Kansdorf's quest. He sees in that the true direction of salvation since only the search which passes death can shed vanity, Perezcaballero's sin.

To say that these men are *saved* suggests, in this era of Fulton Oursler and Billy Graham, some anesthetic transition to peace of mind and relief from nervous tension. Exactly the opposite is true of the book. The solemn reverence, the awe, the ecstasy rise from the most terrible anguish of both flesh and soul. The probing of minds in the book is as thorough as the examination of a condemned man's conscience. There is to this reviewer's knowledge no comparable book in modern fiction.

The style has the sophistication and precise polish of Sartre's *Nausea* though it is, of course, turned to a considerably different end. The texture of the language at times is suggestive of Hopkins' Terrible Sonnets in its somewhat

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Scotist effort to create a sense of the unique truths of experience. In the death scene the point of view flows from Kandsdorf's hallucinating mind to wakeful consciousness, never falling back flatly on either clinical realism or on vague generality. Nor is there any dilettante subtlety here, any false cleverness.

Having purified in his own mind his relation to his long dead wife, Kandsdorf moves on, sensing that a purity beyond human relations is necessary, that his suffering indicates further reward. He grows aware of a face and on it: "Oh, deep peace in the midst of pain! He realized that all of the millions of people he had seen fleetingly in the distance were gazing at this countenance and at what it signified.

"A hairy arm was raised, he saw the wet sweaty hair under the armpit, and the scar of a sword wound in the muscles: with a resounding sound it drove the nail in."

At each line here, especially at the terrible moment above, one feels that the author can build no farther. Yet he does build. On down the page, Kandsdorf realizes that the violating arm is his own and that that too is to be endured. It is through this that he reaches the peace of redemption and his final, almost imperceptible smile, which affects Lebrun so strongly.

Though the story is simple in the sense of plot, there is no more obvious scaffolding here than there is in *Madame Bovary*. The dramatic unity of the narrative depends on a piling up of the significance of special elements. Kandsdorf, for instance, was a convert and had little religious indoctrination. When the story opens, his main interest in the Church is in his aesthetic satisfaction at Catholic architecture. He wanders about churches. Stolpe's skill as a prose stylist is to be especially noted in the almost flawless transition of focus from Kandsdorf's attention to the perfection of the Catholic view in aesthetics, to an interest in Catholic persons, on to his own soul, and so to the Crucifixion.

This review does not pretend to discuss all of the complexities of *Sound of a Distant Horn*. Several bizarre and saintly people not mentioned here are woven into the book, and the narrative touches on homosexuality, Platonic love, and a variety of twentieth-century psychological and philosophical concepts, all of which blend like Gothic details into the living truth of the whole. This is a profound book, written by a master of modern prose, and carries a compelling sense of ultimate truth.

In a poem to *Thin Ice* the author explains that his protagonist, Henry Fortescue, is a recently dead figure of the British Government and that the people and incidents of the story are fictionalized only far enough to avoid embarrassment. Fortescue himself was the author's oldest and closest friend, the two having shared digs at Oxford in 1896 and shared confidences until Fortescue was killed in the Blitz in 1941. Thus though the book is a fiction in a legal sense, its worth is to be found in considering its history. Much of it is written from diaries, journals, and correspondence; the rest is reconstructed from memory. As fiction the book is smooth but extremely thin. Scrupulous care is given to the chronology of events in the narrative, and the mechanical handling of plots is accurate. However, the probing into motives and ultimate human values that fiction offers is neglected, and such depth as the book demonstrates is developed ironically as in Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, where we see through the author's prejudices much that he apparently is not aware of.

The era of *Thin Ice* is that transitional period between the Boer War and

the Blitz; and if Mackenzie does not make one privy to that world as a member of the family, he does go a long way toward making one a highly sympathetic weekend guest. The narrative opens back in that stable century of little wars and rentiers, to a modern reader a highly nostalgic world. The narrator, after a spate of novel-writing, dedicates his life to being a gentleman secretary to such minor orders as the Society of Orchidophiles. The hero begins his career, like the traditional Oxonian, at the Union and rises to a seat in Parliament. His aim is to be a cabinet minister, but this he fails to attain partly because he is a known homosexual and partly because of a certain inviolable integrity he shows toward the waning British Empire. So we see in the narrative the decline of the Fortescue family paralleled by the decline of the Victorian concept of empire.

Henry Fortescue is the oldest son of a great family. When he fails to marry, he ends his line. His only brother goes out to Africa and dies still wealthy and still ruling, though a drunkard. His only nephew dies without issue in a tank battle in North Africa. During the first year or two of the war Henry Fortescue becomes an important government adviser on Eastern affairs. He has failed already as a politician since he has not reached cabinet rank, and his failure expresses itself in his "wandering" after young men in the London blackout. The conclusion is merciful. Subject to extortion and soon to be taken up by the law as a scandalous person, he is killed in a raid on London.

There is no real effort in the book to explain Fortescue's condition. Nevertheless one is offered a thorough insight into many significant social values relative to his sort of person. As a young man he is suave, brilliant, cold—and masculine. At Oxford the euphemism for his sort is *aesthete*, the inference pointing toward the recent Wilde scandal. In society he is spared through the Victorian idea of the woman-hater. Clearly his family and associates are dismayed by his condition, but so long as his dress, manner, and politics remain proper, he is welcome. Victorian hypocrisy aside, there is a true quality of social charity in such treatment. What the narrative illustrates, however, on its two levels of Fortescue's history and the Empire's history is the decline of such civilized society. Originally Fortescue has a "friend" much like himself, a brilliant young woman-hater. Both appear to justify their vice through their brilliance, their future contribution as politicians and statesmen, and through a snobbish disgust at sordidness and scandal. In fact, both live rather restrained homosexual lives, avoiding all sex often for years at a time. As the old traditions pass with the loss of great families and great country houses, Fortescue's reason for restraint passes; and instead of an aesthete, we find him a lewd sixty-year-old, dipping into the erotic clubs of Piccadilly and soliciting in public parks.

The author confesses himself a stuffy Victorian with no way of evaluating Fortescue's conduct or comprehending his desire, which he sees as a progressive disease. He admires his great political knowledge and deep integrity; he respects him as a gentleman and feels for him as a friend. As a result we get an almost unique work in *Thin Ice*: an extremely sympathetic history of an important homosexual in British public life written by a close family friend who is honest enough neither to deny nor to romanticize the most significant quality in his subject.

The major problem any critic faces is whether he is applying merely his own standards to a work or whether he is objectively measuring that work

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according to a standard that it presumes toward. Is the critic justified in caviling at Bing Crosby's interpretation of the role of priest on the ground that the problems of parishioners are falsely resolved through watery songs and gentle smiles? Sister Gervaise, in *The Lively Arts of Sister Gervaise*, is very much a female Bing Crosby, bringing a gentle flow of sweetness and light into the activities of St. Rita's High School and the parish in general. Fortunately none of the problems that confront her requires a serious solution. Among the teenagers whose going steady worries parents and clergy, none turns up pregnant; the beautiful child doomed to die young of diabetes fades out of the story long before his winsome face is drawn and haggard; and the feuds among the nuns never seem to get beyond slight misunderstandings.

The question is partly whether John L. Bonn intends the book as light summer reading or whether he intends it as a true study of faith in action. It is light and moves fast. Sister Gervaise, who gave up a life in the theater for her vocation, is sympathetic, and the reader does feel drawn to her problems. She is harassed by the logistics of teaching, managing the school theater, counseling parishioners, and getting her prayers said. In fact, she moves, we are told, in a constant state of exhaustion. Yet even her exhaustion is of a sweet, light variety, and neither she nor any other character in the novel appears capable of the despair or the anguish or the rage that certify the difference between saints and angels. In *The Lively Arts* grace comes cheaply because the people do not have the natures that human beings have.

In Powers' *Presence of Grace* we are amused by people whose serious problems have been solved (by the implication of faith) and whose natures are usually occupied with trivia. Material of this sort more or less requires a comedy of manners dressed out with wit or even burlesque. Powers offers this. *The Lively Arts* is not a comedy of manners since its materials are presumed to be of the most serious nature: love, marriage, religious vocation, death. Basically the book's weakness lies in the fact that serious materials have been given extremely light handling. We have Sister Gervaise's hectic attempts to keep young Theresa from misinterpreting her adolescent emotions as miracles. This could be funny, though a sentimental tone robs it of both humor and real pathos. Thus we have neither serious literature nor a serious attempt at humor.

Probably the book is intended as a pleasant, positive story for readers who do not want glum religious tales reminiscent of St. Lawrence's martyrdom. Whether this sort of positivism is good is the point. It is presumed that Catholic literature continues to require the dichotomy of good and evil without which the Church itself loses meaning. There is no evil in this novel, and subsequently it is difficult to find it a Catholic novel in spite of its spiritual bouquets, *Hail Marys*, and parish gossip. This novel was recommended in a number of lists as good summer reading, and no doubt it can satisfy those who read it as such. Perhaps the most important aspect, to the critic, of the genre it lies in is the implication its popularity makes about the faith it presumes to reflect. Is grace cheap?

We are informed by Monica Dickens' publisher that she is the great granddaughter of Charles Dickens and that she now lives on Cape Cod. These data demand the New England proverb that there is a limit to the number of generations that can live on one man's name.

On the third page of *The Angel in the Corner* the ten year old heroine replies as follows to her mother's abrupt statement that her father has at last deserted the family for good: "Hating . . . is like pain. But then, loving can be, too. You don't always know which is which." After this and the publisher's blurb suggesting a genetic literary drift, there are no surprises. Virginia, the protagonist, is raised by her sophisticated, career-minded mother and like her becomes an editor. Unlike her mother, who is married conveniently in middle age to a rich American, Virginia marries, for no clear reason, a young London criminal. The point of these diverse matches in the book seems to be that they allow a full Dickens range of social studies: life in the slums, life in the pub, life in a great fashion magazine office, life at the Savoy. It would be misleading to say that the novel degenerates to soap opera; it originates as soap opera.

The characters are presented with the *Ladies' Home Journal* subtlety suggested in the quotation above. Virginia is originally a sweet, precocious girl. She becomes a sophisticated, democratic young lady. Of course, she remains a virgin though her criminal boy friend has a key to her apartment and assaults her in his basement hovel at least once. Virginia's mother is the typical snob of the fashion magazine. The characters who fail most to work out in the novel are not these clichés of current soap opera, however. They are the London poor who are, naturally, pure of heart.

Now Charles Dickens' mastery expressed itself along a quite special, possibly unique line. His real genius was for melodrama. In one way or other he seems to have understood this since his most successful scenes are those in which people of widely different social background are clashed together with all the vitality of the burlesque stage. The Tiny Tims and Micawbers are burlesque, are sentimentality, but on their stage they all yell at once, and the reader is seldom able to object to a particular one of them. Too, Dickens' finest descriptions — such as the crossing sweeper's post in *Bleak House* — are unrolled with a sentiment that he will not relax. Old master that he was, he simply would not let a reader escape from a story.

Monica Dickens' prose is quite different. Her characters, as we had said, are clichés rather than lively burlesque figures. Her scenes are much too near flat reportorial prose to sustain real emotion in a reader. Actually a reader gets the feeling of a guided tour or a social notes column from much of the book. The following scene, for instance, is supposed to show the growth of a deeper-than-flesh love between Virginia and Felix. It does place her by certain implied snobberies, but it hardly suggests in either its materials or its rhythms anything more than might be found in any competent social-notes newspaper column.

Felix, who appeared to be fairly sophisticated, took them to a club in Knightsbridge, where the only illumination was from candles on the tables and the intermittent flames of *crêpes suzettes*. There was a three-piece, dark-skinned orchestra and a handkerchief of dance floor. After the smoked salmon, Felix danced with Virginia. She was disappointed to find that she was a little too tall for him, and wished that she had not been so foolish as to change her working shoes for high heels before they came out. When he danced with Helen after the *tournedos rossini*, their heads were at the right levels. Helen talked excessively to him all through the dance, but he smiled, and did not seem to mind.

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Virginia finished her glass of wine, and then drank up her mother's, since the waiter did not come to pour her any more.

The title refers to a sentimental bit tagged onto the book but not in any architectonic sense pertinent to it. Early in the story Virginia's old nurse speaks of her guardian angel in the corner of the room. We drop this angel, except for one mention, until the action is almost complete. Virginia, anyway, has a purity of hope that requires no angels. She retains her open-heartedness unadulterated though her husband has killed her baby by accident while drunk, torn half her face off with an axe, and starved her badly, among other things. She moves on, never dismayed and never bitter — *ad nauseam*.

The first and most important observation to be made on *The Threshing Floor* is that it is a very bad novel. The narrative, shorn of incidental matters, is the story of an adopted orphan who becomes a successful priest against Horatio Alger odds. The hero, Mario Sarto, begins as the foster child of a recalcitrant New England mill hand and becomes the protégé of a bishop. The initial conflict of the book turns on young Mario's desire for Holy Orders and the innumerable obstacles he must overcome. These include a violent priest-hate on the part of his foster father; an unquenchable love and lust for him on the part of his foster sister; a scandal which places him, innocently, as a panderer between a nun and a devotee of the Black Mass; a scandal in which he, though innocent, is generally believed to have debauched a girl on the night prior to her wedding and so caused her betrothed's suicide; a truancy from his seminary, again innocently while swaying a chum from suicide; and several other minor impediments. After receiving Orders, Mario's trials continue. He gets involved with mad priests, disobedience to his bishop, false miracles, true miracles, and so on. In fact, the trials of the average saint were nothing as compared to those of Mario Sarto.

The over-balance of miracles contributes much to the badness of the book. The bishop risks his entire career on the sanctity of a supposed Jesuit priest martyred by the British and Indians of colonial New England. The martyr is finally discovered to be a British agent killed in disguise. This material seems to hold together well enough. But to show that miracles are sometimes true, the author has a wooden image of the Virgin produce two miracles of healing in the same diocese, and an old Negro parishioner regularly levitates in the presence of the Eucharist. The latter miracle is once used in extremely bad taste. A stolen pyx is located a la Hitchcock by the levitation of the absent-minded old Negress who wanders into a Protestant church by mistake in her devotions. As the book ends, the Pro Cathedral falls "leveling to the ground," though this is only the usual Gothic carrying on of the tale, not a miracle.

In summing up, *The Threshing Floor* is the trash of Catholic literature, crammed with Gothic morbidities and ladies' club sentimentalities. In an effort to reach ultimates in human and religious values the author has produced only exaggerations and oversimplifications. His facts are catalogued reportorially rather than created on the stage of the novel. The better moments of the book — the regrets of a family at a son's going into the priesthood, and the poignant longing for Rome on the part of an old Protestant minister — are lost in the general melodrama. Since the book cannot be unpublished, the best that can now happen to it is that it remain unread.

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ROBERT O. BOWEN

Book Reviews

The Cupboard Restocked

Beginnings: Prose and Verse Selected in a Contest for New Catholic Writers.
Sheed and Ward. \$3.50.

RECENTLY the Sheed and Ward publishing company faced a difficult problem. Through their consistent publication of first-rate Catholic literature, largely drawn from European writers, they helped to create a massive reading public hungry for Catholic books. As the appetite for Catholic literature increased, it became embarrassingly evident that these same readers might soon be confronted by a bare literary cupboard. Where were the publishers to find new Catholic writers?

With characteristic forthrightness they faced this problem by sponsoring a literary contest, offering by way of award to help deserving young writers serve their literary apprenticeship. More than 4,000 manuscripts were entered. Out of this mass of material, under the editorship of Dan Herr, the best has been assembled in *Beginnings*. Including both prose and poetry, the book is so arranged that groups of poems alternate with groups of prose selections. The total includes one article, one essay, twenty-two short stories, and twenty-nine poems. The volume concludes with brief biographical notes on most of the authors.

What does this volume promise for Catholic letters in the years to come? Its literary competence is several degrees better than that manifested in *All Manner of Men*, which was edited to show the best stories published in Catholic magazines between 1951 and 1956. That is, the available talent seems to be better than the used talent.

But it is only talent. Recently John Cournos remarked: "We live in an age in which there is but little genius and a great deal of diffused talent, and we may be tending toward an age—as wisecracks tell us—when there will be no literary creative genius at all." If ours is an age without genius, perhaps we should not grieve that none is manifest in the writings of 4,000 Catholic writers.

However, there are degrees of talent. Not one of these new Catholic writers has so vigorous or controlled a talent as does J. F. Powers, Flannery O'Connor, or Richard Sullivan. Yet freshness and vitality mark "Luis" by J. Michenfelder, M.M., a writer in the public relations department, Maryknoll, New York; a sophisticated simplicity "The Kinderbeast Prize," a reprint from the *New Yorker* by Sister Mary Catherine O'Connor, S. C.; and tart, disturbing ironies "A Sunday Morning Drive" by Austrian-born Maria Berl Lee. These are among the best and indicate the level of competence which is maintained by at least fifty percent of the book. The selections are varied, ranging all the way from the parable "Something Simple with a Moral" by the parish priest, John Shanahan, and an artfully controlled historical sketch of the time of Christ, "Possession in Gerase" (the author of this story might go far if she could salvage time for writing from the care of her six children) to three reprints from college magazines, trite war stories, and the vaguely generalized "Mattey of the Cliffs," which was written by one who has contributed "thousands of articles and stories published in Catholic magazines."

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Concerning the poems in this volume one is reminded of Allen Tate's observation that today one almost never sees a bad poem. Cryptic symbols abound. Most of the poets know the vocabulary of ambivalent symbolism. In contrast to the general illusiveness are Albert J. Griffiths' three accurate monologues which evoke characters more clear than life—as colored pebbles under water appear more bright.

Yet nothing in the whole book points to the discovery of a new idiom to fit our rapidly changing world. Whatever Catholic interest there is remains equally imitative, yet gracefully and tactfully so. One of the things still to be hoped for in the Church and out of it is that some young writer shall be persuaded to follow the advice of Malcolm Cowley who deplores the diffused imitative talent in our own day and sets up the following signposts for young writers: "They might start with the simplest things, as Hemingway did when he was learning to be a writer. They might tell what really happened, and to whom, and how they really felt about it, not how they had been taught to feel or were expected to feel. Then the form of their writing would be determined by the subject matter and it might—in one case out of ten or a thousand—be as new as the sense of life it was intended to express."

College of Saint Benedict

SISTER MARIELLA GABLE, O.S.B.

Familiar Territory

Le Malfaiteur. By Julien Green. Paris: Plon.

The Transgressor. By Julian Green. Translated by Anne Green. Pantheon Books. \$3.50.

JULIEN Green's most recent novel is, in more ways than one, a work of transition. Begun in 1937, laid aside a year later with no more than 100 pages written, it was not completed until 1955. During that seventeen-year interval Green published three other novels, a volume of autobiography (in English), and six volumes of his *Journal*; spent five years lecturing and doing war work in the United States; began writing for the theatre; and, perhaps most important of all, was reconverted to Catholicism. One might wonder why, having abandoned *The Transgressor* [*Le Malfaiteur*] so many years ago, Green felt impelled to return to it. Beyond all doubt, he admits, because, with so much of the work already done, he disliked the waste of effort occasioned by leaving the novel unfinished. Yet also, and this was the determining reason, "to bring to the attention of serious readers one of the most tragic aspects of carnal life in our modern world, tragic because it involves, at times in a violent way, the whole emotional life, and because it impinges seriously upon the spiritual life." The aspect mentioned, already treated more briefly and sometimes merely by implication in the earlier books, was to furnish, some years later, the central theme of *Sud*, Green's first and most successful play.

The situation (in the novel as, later, in the play) is one of skilfully planned symmetries and contrasts. There are two protagonists: Jean, a scholar no longer young, for whom survival is possible for so long only as his real self can be hidden from the world; Hedwige, an ignorant young girl incapable of concealing anything. Both of them are orphans, outsiders, poor relations, camping out rather than living in the provincial home of rich cousins, M. and Mme. Vasseur, whose

aristocratic pretensions serve effectively to emphasize the depressing vulgarity and spiritual indigence of their middle-class background and origins. This dismal family circle is completed by their daughter, Ulrique, arrogant and capricious; Raoul, her insignificant husband; Mme. Pauque, meddlesome and almost ostentatiously false, Mme. Vasseur's sister; the servants; and the dressmaker, Félicie, an abjectly poor, fearful, and resentful old maid. The men of the family are ciphers; the women bored, frustrated, malevolent; the dependent cousins, virtually predestined sacrificial victims.

Both Hedwige and Jean are in love, unhappily and incurably, with an altogether worthless and dubious young man, Gaston Dolange (*ange de douleur?*), in whose inner void nothing subsists but a dogged hunger for money. Both protagonists are abjectly eager to toss away, for the sake of this disastrous infatuation (amounting almost to demoniacal possession), whatever money, security, reputation, and even sanity, their situation as hangers-on of rich relatives may afford them. Hedwige, in fact, for the boon of a few minutes' conversation with this unpleasant being, must solicit the services of Ulrique's crony, the antique-dealer Arlette, a peculiarly sinister go-between of evidently unorthodox tastes. But Jean, because of his poverty, can interest Gaston only casually; Hedwige, because of her sex, not at all. The elder cousin, having learned to do without illusions, would like to impart some of his awareness to the inexperienced girl; but he cannot bring himself to an explicit avowal of the facts in all their crudity. Hedwige cannot and will not understand: communication proves impossible. Nor will anyone else undertake to enlighten the girl: she flounders throughout the novel in a state of what appears to be invincible ignorance. Her gathering misfortunes, while rendering her sufferings unbearable, serve to befog still further an intelligence which was, we feel, at best barely adequate. It is only after having made herself entirely ridiculous, an object of pitying contempt in the unfriendly eyes of everyone, that she will learn the ugly reality from the person whom she most despises and whom she had amused herself by torturing, Félicie. For the dressmaker the revelation means vengeance for fears inflicted and humiliations undergone at the hands of the loathed tribe of Vasseurs: there exists, then, someone to whom even *she*, the abject Félicie, can feel superior. Both cousins choose what seems the only available remedy for existence: suicide.

In a short preface which, regrettably, is not included in the English translation, Green suggests that, for Hedwige, there might have been another way out: "It is natural enough that this novel should bear traces of a return to the Church which I have recounted elsewhere. Probably the most significant passage is the one in which the heroine beholds in a dream a man who endeavors to make her give up all her earthly possessions, then a love foredoomed to failure. Now this man is the Christ, but she does not know it." Throughout the book, in fact, she is aware of nothing, can understand nothing. But Green does not hint that, to Jean, the same way of escape may have been proposed: are we to infer that, whereas Hedwige might have saved herself, for Jean no salvation is conceivable? Hedwige rejects, in any event, the proffered grace: to renunciation she prefers revolt and thereby destroys herself.

The note of revolt, indeed, as Green further indicates in his preface, is strongly sounded throughout, and especially in the first part of the novel, written, one remembers, in the atmosphere of social and political unrest which, on the eve of the Second World War, obsessed most people with the lurid intensity of a nightmare. Like Green's earlier books, *The Transgressor* has the power of

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a nightmare vividly recalled. But is not a nightmare, in a sense, a revolt against daytime sanity and the order of things as, in our waking hours, we know them? This revolt, in the present book, takes strange shapes: the revolt, for example, against his elders and the order they impose upon him, perpetrated by Marcel, the concierge's small boy, in a scene of disturbingly sadistic "play" of which, as one might expect, the accomplice and victim is the forlorn dressmaker; or the revolt of the underprivileged, most abject of the abject, in the person of that same Félicie, who, encountering on the staircase the haughty Ulrique, slaps her full in the face with the surprising consequence that, since neither of them can realize that the thing actually occurred (it *could not* have happened and therefore *did not* happen), the slap is given, received, and accepted with, for Félicie, entire impunity (an outcome—if Ulrique be taken as representative of her class—prophetically accurate). These uprisings are ominously symptomatic. But it is worth noting that, like Hedwige's rebellion against her unendurable condition, they fizzle out in the end. They do not really accomplish anything.

The reader of Green's previous novels finds himself in familiar territory. There is the usual grey provincial setting, the uniformly oppressive and sinister atmosphere, the chorus of blighted and malevolent secondary personages, the boring and joyless solitude, the boundless and dreary *selva oscura* from which the only apparent means of escape are insanity or suicide, the desperate protagonists whose struggles to free themselves serve merely to sink them hopelessly deeper and deeper. In this world of the irredeemable, liberation from the detested prison of the self is at no time possible; effective communication or contact with someone or something outside and beyond that self is never more than a mirage. The sole reality, existence, is hideous, nightmarish; the only outcome, despair.

Yet, surprisingly enough, while the themes, setting, tone, action, and characters of *The Transgressor* recall so insistently those of his earlier fictions, Green does not merely repeat himself. The book is, in its own right, a substantial achievement in the author's earlier manner. It fits naturally into the ensemble of his work, to which it adds something of value. Neither the unity nor the intensity of the novel appears to have suffered from the circumstances of its delayed execution: it does not, as one might have expected, break in two. As is usual in Green's writing there is nothing superfluous: every detail counts; the action moves rapidly toward its necessary tragic end. Some of the scenes are among the best that he has written: the symbolic "execution" scene, for example, involving Félicie and the small Marcel. Or the scene on the staircase, the scene of the incredible slap. Or the scene of "the sad letter and the gay letter" so cruelly humiliating for the unfortunate and obtuse Hedwige.

The portraits, even of secondary figures, are characteristically vigorous. Here, for example, is Mme. Attachère, whom Mme. Vasseur is anxious to impress:

Seated between M. and Mme. Vasseur, as though she were at a play, the mother of handsome Georges Attachère had the face of an overbearing old buccaneer much tanned by the wind and a liver complaint. Gold rings in her ears and a silk handkerchief knotted around her skull emphasized this unintentional likeness. Her stomach bulged under a flowered dress, and she fanned herself with a sweeping, virile gesture, wielding a bouquet of ostrich feathers with great energy, jingling chain bracelets and cabo-

chons on her wrists. She seemed determined not to share the Vasseurs' opinion of Hedwige's talents and looked straight ahead of her, oppressively hostile.

Of Mme. Vasseur herself Green relates: "Her pitiless eye watched her dozing husband's exhausted face as she wondered what madness could have possessed her to bestow herself on that little man, and there her memory tricked her, for she had not bestowed but sold herself to him, before witnesses, and for a very large sum." Here is her son-in-law, Raoul: "Well-fed, long in the body and short-legged, he tried, by means of a small red toothbrush mustache, to give a martial air to a round face suffused with blood made too rich by excellent meals. He usually dressed in black with a stiff high collar that made him look ceremonious and, in a way, completed his personality. One of his familiar gestures was to run his fingers over the top of his head, as though to make sure that his last remaining locks of yellow hair were still there." His wife, Ulrique, "forgave Raoul for his crass foolishness, his bogus good manners, his platitudes, and even his cupidity; she could not excuse his ugliness and short legs, his mustache and a skin that went with sandy hair, or a bodily odor that cologne did not remove. Of course, she had found compensation in other quarters, but less often than she led her both admiring and scandalized mother to believe." Summing up a conversation between Ulrique and her friend Arlette, Green remarks simply: "And so these two idiots conversed."

One might object that the handling of the central theme, that "tragic aspect of life in our modern world," is not altogether successful. The author's treatment of Jean, the elder of the two protagonists, is perhaps too sentimentalized (he is, by the way, the only personage in the book of whom one might fairly make such a criticism). He romanticizes and dramatizes himself; but one feels that Green views him without a tinge of the irony apparent in his vision of all the other characters; that he sees Jean very much as Jean sees himself. The latter remains, in spite of the importance of his role, a rather blurred, shadowy, and unsatisfactory figure. And Hedwige, while in general convincingly portrayed, is perhaps a bit *too* naive to be really plausible. The reader, to whom the truth has long been known, becomes a trifle weary and impatient with her and asks himself if she is *ever* to attain some glimmering of awareness as to what it is all about. And finally, while we are assured that the "petit Dolange" is irresistible, he is presented to us as in every way so unattractive that his presumed fascination never becomes really quite credible. In *Sud* Green managed these things much more skilfully.

The translation, by the author's sister, Anne Green, is excellently done. One regrets that she has not included the preface, for it provides clues lacking which an adequate understanding of the book becomes difficult. And one might question her rendering of the title, even while supposing it approved, as no doubt it was, by the author himself. Is "transgressor" a satisfactory equivalent for "malfaiteur"? Is there not, in the former of these terms, a suggestion of possible forgiveness for what might be, after all, some slight infringement of the law, some sin merely venial? Does not "malefactor" suggest, on the contrary, a criminal, an outlaw, someone definitely beyond the recognized pale? This point leads us, of course, to the question: Who actually *is* the malefactor? Jean? But he seems too obviously a victim. Dolange? But he is too clearly a hollow man to deserve an epithet which would lend him a dignity and personality to

which he could not conceivably pretend. Then who *is* the malefactor? One might venture an interpretation; but perhaps the reader will do well to decide for himself.

The work marks, then, at least for a time, Green's farewell to the novel. At present he appears to be dividing his energies and talents between the theater and (the example of Gide notwithstanding) his *Journal*. If and when he does return to the writing of novels, one awaits with very considerable interest, having in mind the precedent of Henry James, what might well prove to be Julien Green's "major phase."

University of Illinois (Chicago)

JOHN H. MEYER

Hawthorne's Theology

The Light Beyond. By Leonard J. Fick, S.J. Newman Press. \$3.50.

THE kind of study that Fick makes of Hawthorne has inherent dangers. It is always difficult to approach one facet of an author and come up with a view of the whole. This is precisely the difficulty with *The Light Beyond*. It is a study of Hawthorne's theology, and when one is finished with it, somehow the essential Hawthorne, the writer and artist, seems to have disappeared. Perhaps this is not Fick's fault because of the nature of the study. But perhaps it is his fault because of the method of approach. Too often, the author begins with generalizations about philosophical and theological concepts, and then attempts to fit Hawthorne into a prefabricated mold. More than most writers, Hawthorne is elusive and obstinate. He cannot be classified easily; the tradition that he is a part of, he wears casually and lightly. This is not to say that Fick's conclusions are in error. In almost every instance, one is tempted to agree with him. But I think that the author would have done Hawthorne scholarship a better service if his approach had been more inductive. What is so passionately needed in the study of Hawthorne is close attention to the text. This accomplished, one can discover from the reading itself that Hawthorne believes this or that or the other. The procedure that Fick uses seems to indicate that he cannot read the tone of literature with enough acumen and skill; thus he tends to belabor the obvious. For instance, the method followed makes it almost impossible to analyze carefully the tone, method, or meaning of any one complete tale—much less one of the great novels. Each of Hawthorne's masterpieces becomes "evidence" for a point. Outstanding "evidence" is quoted again and again, and the climactic effect such evidence should provide is lost. The method is an essential one for some problems and should be heartily endorsed; but it cannot be used in all instances and for all problems.

Let us look at an illustration. One of the best things in the book is Fick's analysis of the "unpardonable sin," that central critical problem in Hawthorne. He does a better job on it than any previous commentator. His conclusion that the only unpardonable sin "for Hawthorne must be the ultimate failure of man to ask pardon for his sins" is certainly true. And he has amassed a good deal of evidence to prove his point, listing the sins and sinners, and showing how all are pardonable: Hester and Dimmesdale's adultery, Miriam and Donatello's murder, Hollingsworth's lack of reverence for the human soul. But what becomes apparent is the critic's failure to take the opportunity closely to analyze the text

of "Ethan Brand" or "The Man of Adamant" where this problem is dealt with in the most thorough fashion.

Another difficulty presents itself. This method of generalization and then evidence forces the critic to look only at the works. Obviously, the works are of prime importance. But in the study of the thinking of a writer, one should, I suspect, search in every conceivable nook and cranny. Hawthorne himself warns us that he disguises himself as a writer. Fick's argument that Hawthorne believed in freedom of the will is a crucial one. If this is true (and surely it is), Hawthorne is forever separated from the orthodox puritanism that he has so often been charged with. Would not this argument have been strengthened by gathering together not only the comments in his fiction, but his non-fictional ones as well, and adding to this whatever can be made of the influence that formed him? Certainly a knowledge of the fact that Hawthorne was formally educated to believe in freedom of the will would have added to the strength of the argument.

If, however, the reader is looking for conclusions that make Hawthorne an integral part of the Aristotelian-Aquinatic tradition, this is the book to read. One may find the listing of formal conclusions a bit difficult to take, but the evidence is valuable. It has not been emphasized enough that Hawthorne was deeply conscious of the fatherhood of God, that he was much impressed by the Christian mysteries, that he had a keen and wise view of salvation and God's mercy. These things Fick brings to our attention with new force. He does not neglect Hawthorne's deep sense of the sinfulness of man; but he does not identify this with puritanism, pessimism, or determinism. As a practiced theologian, Fick knows what he is talking about when it comes to theological terms and concepts, a refreshing experience when one remembers the nonsense that has been written about Hawthorne's theology. Too often, one wants to ask other critics if they have looked the word up in a dictionary.

The book is stimulating enough to make for arguments and agreements. I would like, for instance, to argue with Fick in his estimate that "Hawthorne is in agreement with Melville" on the cause of man's tragedy. It is becoming more apparent that Melville's tragic insight has been much over-estimated—that his insight is too often muddled and confused. To place him in the same category with Hawthorne elevates him to a stature which he might have difficulty holding. But any good critical work invites such disagreements. On the whole, Fick has accomplished a work that was needed. If it is too pat in its conclusions, this can be blamed on the method used rather than the evidence offered.

Marquette University

JOSEPH SCHWARTZ

Age and Inheritance

Brocéliande. By Henry de Montherlant. Paris: Gallimard.

Les Auligny. By Henry de Montherlant. Paris: Amiot-Dumont.

Montherlant et l'héritage de la Renaissance. By Jean Datain. Paris: Amiot-Dumont.

BROCÉLIANDE, Montherlant's twelfth and most recent contribution to the stage, is in the vein of his *Fils de Personne* rather than that of *Le Maître de Santiago* or *Port-Royal*, at least as far as the choice of subject is concerned: the setting, the problem, and the people involved are contemporary rather than historical. But the dramatic theme is one to which the author of *Malatesta* returns incessantly, whether the backdrop be a Parisian apartment or a Renaissance palace: the fate of the individual in the face of external forces intruding upon his cherished illusion. Played for the first time at the *Théâtre Français* on October 24, 1956, the initial success of the composition is an indication of the plaudits to come. Not only may it be staged with a minimum of props, but it has the greater virtues of being balanced in form, rich in characterization, brilliant in style, and charged with wit.

The action unfolds in the home of M. and Mme. Persilès, the former being the head of the office of the Ministry of Public Ruins. Madame has withstood the ravages of time, but her husband is showing signs of becoming identified with his governmental bureau. His shoes have holes in them; his shoulders droop; his memory fails; his fear of people waxes with every interview; he longs for retirement. Bidding fair to become a public ruin, M. Persilès is visited by M. Bonnet de la Bonnetière, librarian of the Institute of Numismatics. In the course of his researches, the latter has discovered that the former is a descendant of Saint Louis, "par les femmes."

Bitten by the genealogical bug, M. Persilès recovers interest in life to the point of being able to stand up straight with his hand on his hip, in regal attitude. He treats his inferiors with befitting humility and quotes the sayings of the kings of France. He buys new books for his library and undertakes a series of investigations which may lead, he hopes, to the publication of an essay on Saint Louis in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. If only he could have chosen his ancestor! Bayard or William the Conqueror would have been more in tune with his nature. National and even international events come to have a greater significance: the royal heart should be large enough to encompass all, were it the floods in the Midi, the wages of the employees of the Gas Company, or the Yellow Peril. Indeed, genealogy is the touchstone of the modern world. Its magic is irresistible. Who would fail to heed its lure? Genealogy is poetry, perhaps. Composed as it is of crescents, roses, dolphins, stars, and stags, "and all this in all the colors of creation," did Mallarmé or Apollinaire ever write so concisely, so hermetically?

But the world is cruel, and the illusion is taken away. M. Persilès learns that descendants of Saint Louis exist by the thousand, that he is but one of many. With his dream destroyed, M. Persilès is destroyed. And Montherlant's choice of title for his play comes to the reason of its choice: each must have an enchanted forest in which to dwell, as a magician, if he is to escape his being. If this bit of Merlin be denied or crushed, then he has nothing more to do than

to use the forms of society, until the day of his retirement, when he becomes another "public ruin."

Montherlant does not specify whether his play is a tragedy, comedy, or a combination of both. But he gives the answer in his preface to the play. "*Brocéliande* is a sad play in an envelope of half-gaiety. There was formerly at Rome, in the Pio Clementino Museum, an ancient statue of the muse of comedy—I say clearly: of *comedy*—of which I have a reproduction. Now, the mask that Thalia holds in her hand is a frightening mask, and her own face, with the pout on her mouth, and the distant look in her eye, is a face heavy with melancholy. This statue represents rather well a sort of comedy to which *Brocéliande* belongs." In fact, one is reminded of this more sombre side of comedy as it is encountered in Molière. The excesses of M. Persilès and the stolidity of his wife recall M. and Mme. Jourdain. There are also echoes of Harpagon on the verge of madness, Alceste's misanthropy, and Argan's self-concern. *Brocéliande* may not be Montherlant's greatest contribution to the stage, but it is high comedy fostering tragic implications that place it in the tradition of earnest theater.

Readers of *Renaissance* may recall a review of Montherlant's *Histoire d'amour de la rose de sable* in Vol. VI (1953), pp. 60-61. This novel by Montherlant, it was not pointed out in the review, was limited to a private printing and it is only with unusual good fortune that a copy of this deluxe volume could or can now be obtained in complete format. The novelist had averred that this first printing would be the only version of the text of *La Rose de Sable*. But then he apparently had a change of heart or purse, for he published a large portion of the volume in 1954, after releasing it to the editor of a periodical. Thus that section of the work has appeared in three different places. And now *Les Auligny* follows the same pattern although this popular version is somewhat limited in the number of copies printed. Originally a section of the first version of *La Rose de Sable*, it is now offered as a separate item to the general public.

The current offering is composed of three sections, the first of which concerns the story of M. and Mme. Auligny. The latter is the driving force in the family. Possessed as she is of visions of grandeur and glory, she pushes her husband's career in government service although he is quite happy to remain as unpromoted and as undisturbed as possible. For it is the sad truth that Monsieur's ambitions do not go beyond stealing a ball of twine or a bottle of ink from the government. His only three ventures come after retirement: a fling at the stock market which ends when his wife discovers his losses; an unprofitable attempt to buy and sell knickknacks; a fruitless effort to satisfy a physician with only a partial payment of his fee. There are two children by the marriage: a daughter whom the mother sees as the wife of general, and a son who she knows will be a general. For there is only one source of true valor, the French army that always has to fight against ten-to-one odds. But the daughter dies, and the son fails his examinations.

Yet the son is still destined for the army, and Madame Auligny arranges for his transfer to Morocco after he enlists and is promoted to second lieutenant. Thus the second section of *Les Auligny* records the young officer's arrival in the African staging area of L . . . and describes the characters he meets: the Colonel and his wife, the aviator, Mlle. Marcelle. The third section is devoted to Lucien's arrival at Birbatine and his orders "to do as little as possible and cause no talk." The selections terminate with the account of the Arabic philologist, M. Combet-David, and Colonel Roger's coming to Birbatine.

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The principal interest is in the characters rather than in the episodes. The theme that Montherlant develops is not new to him: the stupidity and ambition of people in government service. The reader meets the same old Montherlantian impatience with puritanical pretense and pride, the same old admiration for the adventurous and the youthful. But one cannot help regretting that the author of *La Rose de Sable* has made piecemeal offerings of the original work. Or, now that the separate presentations have been made, will Montherlant consent to a publication *in toto* now that he has whetted the public appetite with fresh evidence of his ability to make the French language leap to meaning and brightness at a wave of his pen? In any event, *La Rose de Sable* has had extensive and enviable publicity. If it is ever published for the general public, the press agents will have had their task made easier for them.

A recent addition to Montherlantian bibliography, *Montherlant et l'héritage de la Renaissance*, examines the characteristics traditionally considered to be the basic ingredients of the Renaissance in Italy and ascertains the extent of their presence in this writer's works and personality. The study is slanted directly towards *Malatesta*, because this play is so obviously lodged in the heart of the matter.

Following Nietzsche and more academic scholars, Datain holds that the liberation of the individual and a concomitant scorn for authority are the two basic hallmarks of the man of the Rinascimento. But, as for Malatesta himself, he is more subtly portrayed. He does not proclaim his independence openly. He says, "I am a general. I cannot be a philosopher." So, Datain points out, it is his generalship, knowing no authority, which places him above and beyond restraints that, were they imposed, would prove intolerable. Hence he is contemptuous of "people who are confident," for confidence, a movement in trust towards other people, is an encroachment upon the unbridled freedom which he must have. The other characters in *Malatesta* are seen as following the same dictates of selfhood: da Rimini will be the instrument of nothing but his own destiny; Platina, the academician, endures the supervision of the Pope only because his mind attains its greatest liberty under these circumstances.

The mark of the true man of the Rinascimento, then, is his quest for the resplendent truth of himself. He loves his city, for he is of it; he loves nature, for he is of this too. Not to recognize these loves is to fail in the ancient and heroic struggle for immortality and to fall, subsequently, into the eighth capital sin, sadness. But the Twentieth Century belongs to the Christian era, and the problem is not so simple for Montherlant. There must be recourse to a pagan-Christian syncretism, this last being a natural tendency of the mind to keep ideas, tendencies, and sensations near each other so that they may be exploited although they "reveal themselves, for religious, moral, or other reasons, to be conciliatory only with difficulty."

The problem of good and evil assumes especial importance in the instance of a humanist like Montherlant, and the second part of Datain's examination of the playwright's position is concerned with his views on man's nature and the persistence of the contrary directions which his being may follow on account of its constant pluralism. And so we return to an extensive analysis of Montherlant's "alternance" and the varying stress placed by him upon sensitivity and cruelty, femininity and masculinity, belletristics and war, reflection and activity, self-confidence and discouragement, destructiveness and constructiveness, deceit

and loyalty. These tendencies are considered as they assume their varied hues in pagan or Christian light.

There is also an analysis of Montherlant's style in general and in *Malatesta*. The entire third section is devoted to a minute evaluation of the various characters in this play and the plausibility of their behaviour and decisions. The concluding chapter is a rather ingenious explanation of how the story of Malatesta came to consume Montherlant's interest; neat parallels are drawn between the play itself and the dramatist's personal experiences with authority in school. Documentary support for the argument is based upon the work of Faure-Biguet. The book closes with four appendices: the reception that various critics accorded to *Malatesta*, a bibliography for Montherlant, a genealogical chart for Malatesta, and another for the Montherlant family.

The book, then, has much to say on the subject of Montherlant and his works, but the core of interest is always *Malatesta*. Why was this particular play chosen as the subject of comment? Dattin repeats the sentiments expressed by Léon Savary to the effect that, of all the ages of the past, it is the Italian Renaissance that modern man is least capable of understanding. And it is beyond doubt to this age that Montherlant has remained faithful since 1912 in spite of all the subsequent regimenting forces that have tried to reduce him in war or in peace.

SPIRE PITOU

Bay Flannel

Give Me Possession. By Paul Horgan. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. \$3.50.

OME novels are written so as to strike deep into the human heart and reveal a profound wisdom. Others are written to excite the armchair adventurer vicariously. The novel of manners does neither of these. The patterns of its actions are, of course, based on custom and so can offer little mechanical suspense. The values are set at the level of manners, which denies the form profundity. Thus the novel of manners is decorative by nature; its merits must lie in stagecraft rather than drama, in wit rather than wisdom.

Give Me Possession, Paul Horgan's latest work, is a novel of manners in its conception. This is apparent in Book I, which deals cleverly with the childhood of a couple "who belonged to the race of golden Californians in the period between the wars." The girl is the pleasantly spoiled heiress to a great San Francisco estate; the boy is the attractively opportunistic son of a middle class family. Horgan's wit in the handling of the first book of the novel is the richest element the finished work affords. The skill of Meredith or Beerbohm is here in the posings of Old Dale, the desert prep school head, who utters cryptic, manly talk but nevertheless holds firmly to the principle that "the student is always right." How else could it be when many of his students come west to the school in their families' private railroad cars? The first book of the novel, then, called "Tribal Customs," is fast and polished. There is specifically nothing wrong with it though one does wonder whether the calm elegance of the prose has not refined out rather too much. There is no hilarity here, and good taste seems to have excluded any truly biting satire.

Books II and III, "The Young Warrior" and "Maturity Rites," veer sharply

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away from the initial concept of the novel of manners. These deal with the young couple's marriage, the hero's war service in Europe, and a post-war bastard problem in many ways strikingly similar to that in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. The narrative in these two books is seriously hampered by the distinct wit carried into them from Book I. Clearly the author's intent here differs. The war scenes and the post-war scenes of advertising men at work represent serious human problems.

The hero, for instance, returns to France to find a lover he had left there in a shattered village. An ancient village priest explains to the hero that American wealth cannot perform charity for the ruined French, that their suffering is not to be relieved, and so on. Although such material cannot be anything but serious, its handling here must just as certainly be shallow since the cleverness and extremely gentle sarcasm of Book I have modeled the prose in which it is cast. The dilemma is that the novel of manners is decorative and cannot deal with profound materials although the plot here requires certain details in the realm of the profound.

Thus we find that at certain points the novel becomes slick rather than polished. As an instance, the hero makes a secret journey to France to seek the girl he had loved in combat and to decide with her whether he should abandon the glitter of the Bay Region for a purgatorial love in poverty. Now, at this point only an extremely dull reader would fail to note that the heroine is *enceinte*. The obviousness of this gimmick destroys any possible drama because within the sweet and gentle tone of the narrative it is inconceivable that the hero not return. Ergo: no suspense, no drama.

However, *Give Me Possession* does include a rather broad, if not deep, coverage of a new American type, and for this reason the book is worth reading thoughtfully. The type is represented in David, the hero, who is "... a glittering example of the Scholasticus Californicus, sunburned, affable, physically a specimen of a new superb race upon the earth, but intellectually and—should we say it?—ethically as incurious and innocent as a golden lion cub." Throughout the book David demonstrates taste and in certain regards breeding. He does not demonstrate any sense of sin or of salvation. Pragmatically speaking, David is already saved. He has the Bay Region; why should he wish Heaven? In David's golden world there is no longer even the memory of Hawthorne's sense of evil.

If David were portrayed as a lost soul or a villain, the critical problem would be quite simple. As is, he is that sort of ideal hero the reader is intended to approve. The betrayal of David's marriage vows does not indicate corruption. His offer of cash as charity for his bastard does not indicate a lack of heart. He is a courageous combat officer and a kind husband. He cannot be corrupt since he has lost no values. In fact, he continues to gain in character, in maturity, as the narrative progresses. But all of the values he gains are social. In his eyes the world would be redeemed if it could be brought to San Francisco to work in the advertising business, carouse mildly, and decorate its new houses tastefully.

Unfortunately David is true; a new and golden race has sprung up amongst us, a race so different in its source of values that it can answer the oldest Christian question with a simple and honest sense of propriety.

"What does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he lose his own soul?"

"San Francisco is his profit—and beyond that there is no other."

Montana State University

Robert O. Bowen

British and Benedictine

In a Great Tradition: The Life of Dame Laurentia McLachlan, Abbess of Stanbrook. By the Benedictines of Stanbrook. Harper. \$5.00.

THE life of a religious woman is a subtle paradox of complex simplicity, and the biographer who attempts to write about a nun may discover that scrupulous reporting of detail has resulted in an emphasis on externals which results in falsification of the whole. He is shocked when critics assail his honesty; the facts cannot be impugned; it is the truth which has eluded him. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why there are so few really good books about nuns. To those outside the cloister, the horarium, customs, and traditions have a romantic interest; it is the complexities of conventual discipline that appeal. To those who live serenely "this side of the cloister" there is a tendency to oversimplify, to ignore the scaffolding, the traditional minutiae which support the spiritual life.

The Benedictine nuns of Stanbrook Abbey have, in a life of Dame Laurentia McLachlan, *In a Great Tradition*, done a remarkably successful job of portraying the great woman who was their Abbess for twenty-two years, since they are constantly aware, as the reader is bound to be, and as Dame Laurentia herself insisted, "Whatever I am is the result of my life here."

The biographer balances what Dame Laurentia was upon the fulcrum of the traditions in which she lived. For Dame Laurentia was a daughter of St. Benedict, and even more specifically a child of the English Benedictines who, during the Tudor persecution in 1623, fled to Cambrai, returning to England a century and half later during the French Revolution, clothed in the cast-off clothing of the guillotined Carmelites whose story Gertrud von le Fort has made memorable in *Song at the Scaffold*. In the years on the continent they had remained both British and Benedictine. Dame Gertrude More, great-great-granddaughter of St. Thomas More, and Dame Catherine Gascoigne, co-foundresses, together with Dom Augustine Baker, their first spiritual director, gave a peculiarly English quality to the monastery of exiled nuns in Cambrai; and what is even more remarkable, in the country and century of Jansenism's greatest triumph, the spirit of St. Benedict which combines liturgical worship and shrewd spiritual insight with devastating common sense had taken such firm root that the English nuns were known for their simple, thoroughgoing, unspectacular holiness.

It was to the restored Benedictine Abbey school of Stanbrook that sixteen-year old Margaret McLachlan came in 1881 as a student. Three years later she knocked at the enclosure door to ask formal admittance as a postulant, receiving from the Lady Abbess the name Laurentia by which she would henceforth be known.

Those who know little of the intellectual discipline of religious training are apt to conclude that the nineteen-year-old who becomes a nun remains intellectually and emotionally nineteen years old for the rest of her life. Dame Laurentia herself would have felt such stagnation to be a betrayal of the grace of vocation which "through its subtle and almost irresistible force perfects the character through the development of spiritual and even natural gifts when faithfully followed."

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An instinctive artist with a fine musical sense, she had the good fortune to be professed at the time of the great Gregorian revival, and to Dom André Macquereau of Solesmes she turned for advice and guidance when she was placed in charge of the monastic choir at Stanbrook. The chapters devoted to her contributions to the field of plain song in England and her studies in paleography give evidence of her authentic scholarship. She was acquainted with every musician of note whether Catholic or non-Catholic, was consulted by scholars from all over the world, contributed generously to *Music and Liturgy* in addition to compiling *The Grammar of Plain-chant*, and in 1927 was elected vice-president of the Plain Song and Mediaeval Music Society.

It was her study of the Worcester Antiphoner, the thirteenth century Benedictine Antiphoner in the Worcester Cathedral Library, that brought her the friendship of Edmund Bishop, and it was he who taught her to write, "not with broad assertions bolstered up only by proofs from 'authoritative writers' but with true knowledge acquired slowly and painfully from original documents." Other friendships which grew out of her studies of ancient manuscripts were with C. W. Dyson Perrins (of Lea and Perrins' Worcester sauce fame), himself a collector of ancient illuminated manuscripts, and through him Sir Sydney Cockerell, whose comment on their first meeting was that she seemed "to know everything, not only about her own special studies, but about all that was taking place in the world outside."

One of the most delightful chapters in the book, "The Nun and the Humanist," records the friendship of more than forty years between Dame Laurentia and Sir Sydney, a chapter made poignant by her inability to share with him what was dearer to her than mediaeval music, history, or illuminations—her faith. Their letters on this subject, closest to her heart, are remarkable human documents, blending exquisite tact with absolute integrity. It was Sir Sydney Cockerell who introduced her to his friend, George Bernard Shaw, a friendship which Dame Laurentia hoped "God might use for this soul's salvation."

It is this chapter that appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, July-August, 1956, and which will perhaps give permanent value to the book. Certainly no critic will dare attempt an analysis of Shaw or his work from now on without careful study of the correspondence. The editor of the *Atlantic* noted that "rarely has such a contest of letters or conflict of views formed the basis of so long and so lasting a friendship." Provocative and amusing with recognizable Shavian wit, the letters have an intensity and warmth with a total absence of the buffoonery for which Shaw was famous. They reveal other surprising aspects of his character. He had a tender, if totally unorthodox, devotion to Our Lady, and his comprehension of the spiritual meaning of a religious vocation occurs again and again. "When we are next touring in your neighbourhood I shall again shake your bars and look longingly at the freedom at the other side of them," he wrote on one occasion. Touching too is the evidence of Shaw's profound belief in the value of prayer. "I don't mind being prayed for . . . The ether is full of prayers . . . and I suppose if I were God I could tune in to them all. Nobody can tell what influences those prayers have . . . So let the sisters give me all the prayers they can spare; and don't forget me in yours."

The letters are full of surprises, such as his shrewd comment in September

1931, on Russia, "I have just been in Russia, the oddest place you can imagine. They have thrown God out by the door, and he has come in again by all the windows in the shape of the most tremendous Catholicism." And from the world-famous atheist came this wistful hope: "If I try to sneak into paradise behind you they will be too glad to see you to notice me."

It is good to know that the friendship temporarily broken by the publication of the iconoclastic and blasphemous *The Black Girl in Search of God* was resumed by Dame Laurentia herself, acting upon her Archbishop's counsel, and that on his ninety-fourth and last birthday Shaw could write, "God must be tired of all these prayers for this fellow Shaw whom He doesn't half like. He has promised His servant Laurentia that He will do His best for him, and we had better leave it at that. The thought of Stanbrook is a delight to me. It is one of my holy places."

Dame Laurentia emerges from the letters and from the pages of the book a warm-hearted, deeply religious woman, possessed of charm, wit, and a lively intellect. Her greatness has less to do with the accidents of friendship and fame than with the total quality of her vocation. She was more completely the woman because she was so completely the nun.

In *A Great Tradition* is written in strong, fluid prose, remarkably free from the genteelisms that so frequently plague the religious biographer. It is a book that will satisfy both those who wear the habit and those who do not.

Mount Mary College

SISTER M. HESTER, S.S.N.D.

Forcing the Door

La Nouvelle Revue Française: Hommage à Paul Claudel, 1868-1955. Numéro Spécial, 3e Année, No. 33.

THIS special number of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* is a volume of *hommages* commemorating the career of Paul Claudel and containing a number of *inédits* by Claudel himself. The volume is divided into six sections: "Hommages," "Le Monde Claudélien," "Le Poète et le dramaturge," "Le Philosophie et le critique," "Souvenirs," and "Textes inédits." Some twenty-five contributors have shared in composing the volume: Saint-John Perse, Jules Supervielle, Jules Romains, Marcel Jouhandeau, Francis Ponge, Maurice Blanchot, Jean Grosjean, Y. Le Hir, Georges Poulet, Philippe Jaccotet, Pierre Oster, A. R. de Renéeville, Etienne, Georges Perros, Jean Wahl, Jean Starobinski, Roger Judrin, A. Berne-Joffroy, Jacques Duron, Armand Lunel, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Maxime Alexandre, Robert Mallet, Franz Hellens. Among the *textes inédits* there are letters to Piero Jahier and Pierre Lhoste.

The image of Claudel which emerges from this assortment of studies, testimonials, and recollections is highly contradictory. Perhaps more than any other modern man of letters, Claudel has both enjoyed the highest praise and suffered the most bitter denunciations. In spite of the recent renewal of interest in Claudel since the war, Jacques Duron expresses the view in "Le Mythe de Tristan" that his works are as little understood today as they were in 1900. "The position of Paul Claudel, as far as we are concerned, is in sum rather disconcerting. Here is a man whom important 'witnesses' have long since placed among those supreme poets whom he himself described as imperial . . . and

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whose poetic work is, however, on the verge of encountering in public opinion the same reticence as at the beginning of the century, at the time when Claudel seemed to speak as in an impenetrable wad." Elucidating further the situation of Claudel today, Duron states: "The classic Rightists could not assimilate Paul Claudel, and the intellectual Leftists could scarcely show themselves more favorable to the author of an *Art poétique* which founds on the active continuity and correlation of beings the system of a metaphysics opened at the summit like the basilica built by Saint Helena on the Mount of Olives."

Whereas true *Claudéliens* are few in number, *anti-Claudéliens* are legion. Among the latter Duron mentions: "Cartesians, worldlings, Jansenists, Gallicans, Gideans, Maurassians, surrealists, grammarians, the *précieux*, poets of the free or the academic manner: one can hardly see in so many different refusals [to accept Claudelian poetry] anything but one common denominator, and this would be a sort of intolerance or allergy not merely towards genius itself but actually towards the type of lyricism inherent in this sort of genius and the excesses that it has with its moderation, the violence it has with its balance, the infinite that it has with its finite. It is a savage lyricism, disconcerting as soon as it starts."

Yet it is certainly not the *lyrisme sauvage* which disconcerts most in Claudel as it does not disconcert in Whitman, in Rimbaud, in Shakespeare, nor in the greatest of Claudel's sources, the Bible. It is rather a contradiction within himself and which makes his work a baffling palimpsest to the modern reader. This contradiction underlies four essays in the present collection which are the only ones to make any attempt to criticize or explicate the poet: "L'Autre Claudel," by Maurice Blanchot; "Oeuf, Semence, Bouche Ouverte, Zéro" by Georges Poulet; "Paul Claudel et le Vin des Rochers," by Etienne; and "L'Octave de la Création," by Jean Wahl. The contradiction may be stated simply as that of a man who, in the twentieth century, lives in a world that has scarcely changed since Dante.

In an introductory piece, "Silence pour Claudel," Saint-John Perse gives expression to such a view: "He has founded on reason, and his rule is established on a principle of authority; his geometry is Euclidian; his method, scholastic—but his drama, Newtonian, is that of a gravitation." And further: "... he was *Tête-d'Or* under Saint Thomas, as Alexander was a student of Aristotle."

The universe of Claudel is egocentric. I say this, not in a pejorative sense nor by way of judgment, but as one says that the medieval world was geocentric, that its theology was anthropomorphic. In "Oeuf, Semence, Bouche ouverte, Zéro," Georges Poulet analyzes the circular and syllogistic world in which Claudel lives and creates. "It is a finite space, that is surrounded, as in the Middle Ages, by an infinite space, God, or the Empyrean . . ." Thus the circle, the egg, the open mouth, become symbols of the Claudelian universe. Saint-John Perse notwithstanding, there is nothing Newtonian about such a world: "From this fact the time of the Tree or of man cannot be confounded with the Newtonian flux, any more than human space with an infinite extent. As in the Aristotelian becoming, time consists of developing and bringing a form to perfection gradually." Claudel has reconstructed a world of forms, essences, matter, substance, which is in large measure a medieval legacy. The poet is "a universal circular presence," and his poetic gift is, as Claudel is reported to have said to Robert Mallet, a second gift of grace. By definition, the poet, invested with the sacred

Word, stands at the center of the world; "... human space is what is distributed about a center. And this center can be only Claudel himself."

But how is it possible for a poet of the twentieth century to take up such a position? Perhaps only because any position is, after all, possible. Maurice Blanchot does, however, suggest in "L'Autre Claudel" by what means, if not for what motives, Claudel assumes such a position. Yet not without, first of all, presenting his thought-pattern in a most contradictory fashion. He asserts of Claudel surprisingly: "He is the modern man, the man who is sure only of what he touches, is not concerned with himself, but with what he does, does not wish dreams, but results, for whom nothing is of importance except the work and the decisive fullness of the work." This certainly is not a definition, nor even an evocation of post-Freudian, post-Surrealist, post-World War, post-neo-Thomistic modern man. Blanchot errs in his diagnosis at the outset, confusing theological certitude, so basic for Claudel, with positivistic certitude which does not exist for Claudel:

Do not consign me to perdition with the Voltaires and the Renans and the Michelets, and the Hugos, and all the rest of the infamous crew!

Their soul is with the dead dogs; their books are on the dunghheap.

But Blanchot in another two pages corrects himself without seeming to be aware that there was need. "If he gives the impression that only impersonal sentiments are close to him, . . . if he seems, to a surprising degree, alien to the cleft conscience that has been made manifest by our age, our believing and our disbelieving age, this does not say that he could, right from the start, live and speak without difficulties and without divisions . . ."

In fact, it becomes clear that Claudel's universe has been chosen for the sake of order. I would add also for the sake of poetry. "... he had need of a system capable of putting him in order with himself." Claudel's medieval world is the result then of a choice; it is a device by which he may escape the infinite and the indeterminate—a more recent word is the "Absurd"—which is "for the mind the same abomination and the same scandal." "... the man who has not made up his mind then, for whom he experiences repulsion and anguish, anguish which is betrayed in him only by the refusal and dissimulation of anguish." Thus by a refusal Claudel comes to define his writing as a kind of *anti-dévoilement*: the systematic hermeticism of *La Maison Fermée*. The writer not only has something to reveal; he may equally well have something to conceal. Blanchot suggests this, speaking of Claudel's mystical crisis: "Claudel does not give himself away easily, and, besides, all these movements are secret, scarcely visible behind the material of a hard and objective prose. And the crisis itself, however known it may be in its contours, remains even today covered and hidden." Thus Claudel needed and found a system which would put him to rights with himself. He found a point of view and this point of view supplied him with a rhetoric and a *Weltanschauung*. Blanchot draws finally a parallel between Claudel and Goethe, whom Claudel hated: "Same instinctive withdrawal with regard to the Pascalian anguish, same refusal of the infinite, same disavowal of all that is risky and beyond measure. The powers of darkness, the genies of evil, all those who damn themselves inspire them with a feeling of unease from which they protect themselves with a certain search for honorific positions and with their majestic complacency toward fortune and social institutions."

BOOK REVIEWS

The philosopher Jean Wahl, in his essay "L'Octave de la Création," attempts to show, with an admirable display of knowledge, how Claudel stands philosophically. This is difficult, since Claudel was not a philosopher, but made frequent use of philosophical language to express poetic ideas. "In his immense meditation, Claudel makes use of all mythologies, both pagan and, if he will pardon me, Christian." His essay becomes a series of partial approvals, qualifications, punctilious disagreements, cautious admonitions, and queries. It is not possible to discuss here the numerous parallels which Wahl establishes between Claudel and the philosophers. His discussion of causes alone would carry us farther than present time permits. Yet as we would expect, the Aristotelian notion of cause arises. "Aristotle intervenes gravely, gravely and grievously" and "Claudel goes back to a profound idea, but also a profoundly false idea of Aristotle; our causality, at a certain stage in its history, is built upon the form of the syllogism. But let us remember exactly what it said to us: our premises are not those of nature."

Jean Wahl takes up again the famous "Nous ne naissons pas seuls. Naître, pourtant, c'est co-naître. Toute naissance est une connaissance." Wahl concludes: "L'important pour nous, c'est que l'idée de connaissance est généralisée, universalisée, de telle sorte que toute chose connaît, et même connaît toute chose." It would seem appropriate, however, to indicate here that this is not a generalization, but the substantialization of an *abstractum*. Knowledge is assimilated to a birth and apparently on the basis of a false etymology which confuses the etyma of *naître* and *connaître*, assuming them to be derived from the same root (*nascere*, *cognoscere*). Claudel thus erroneously derives authority from etymology. Such substantializations are characteristic of Claudel as they are characteristic of Aristotelian thinking. But perhaps this is really what Wahl means when he concludes: "Prophet of recent times, of the recent days of Christianity and of Occidental thought, Claudel is at the same time one of those who permit us to return to this sympathy arising from things . . ." If indeed this is his thought, his essay would have served Claudel better if he had begun at the end.

The most trenchant essay in the volume, though also the least sympathetic to Claudel and at times scarcely courteous, is Etienneble's "Paul Claudel et le Vin des Rochers." It is certainly the most illuminating from a literary point of view. Obviously not an *aficionado* of Claudel ("That Claudel, how even to detest him? A serpent, one of Koch's bacilli, who could hate him, except another serpent, another one of Koch's bacilli?"), Etienneble attacks Claudel on the ground of literary bad faith and accuses him of being, at times, an impostor. "You will find absolutely no rimes in my verse, nor any witchcraft," Claudel had written. Etienneble proceeds to find both countless examples of rime and countless examples of witchcraft. What of his *bout-rimés* of 1885? Etienneble quotes:

Dans la lumière éclatante d'automne
Nous partîmes le matin,
La magnificence de l'automne
Tonne dans le ciel lointain.

And then he adds: "The *tonne-tonne dans* is another precious piece of witchcraft."

Pursuing an ethico-aesthetic principle, he even discovers camouflaged Alexandrines. "It is thus that *La Vierge à Midi*, quite adorned with camouflaged

Alexandrines, from this very fact is enriched with a witchcraft that can draw purrs from even those who (I am one of them) are disgusted by displays of Marian hysteria." Thus Etienne brilliantly implies of the man who hated all Art for Art's Sake, who said to Mallet: "Do not go too far in your comparison. You will end up by making a work of art of God," that he is more of an artist than he will admit. And in this Etienne sees nothing wrong except the lack of admission. He even implies a more subtle question: Was God, perhaps, one of Claudel's greatest works of Art? "But if you wish to announce to all men your sardines, your wine, your 'truth,' what more certain arguments than the iambic rhythm and the syllable that corresponds. The electric company knows this much . . . as do the dealers in sacramental wine: see on His death, Paul Claudel, the well done rimes that *Le Figaro Littéraire* published. It being a question of paying a homage, I shall be pleased to pilfer these. No matter, the trick is played."

And what, one may ask, is the point of all this? Curious "homages" that show Claudel to be confused in his thinking, an aesthetic imposter, and the exponent of a medieval world. The point is only that of any criticism: to force the door of the poet's *Maison Fermée*, to read his message in spite of him and to understand such statements as: ". . . we create only what we have permission to create."

Modern poetry is obscure; Claudel and Valéry are obscure. But there is a meaning even to obscurity and Valéry's obscurity is not that of Claudel. In "Un Esprit Concret" Robert Mallet tells of a person-to-person encounter with the obscurity of Claudel:

I am beginning again to be the person that I should not have stopped being: the editor of his *Oeuvres Complètes*, and I ask him a few dozen questions about points that have seemed to me questionable in the collections of poems for which I am to offer the *ne varietur* text. For example:

"Do you confirm in *La Messe La-bas*: 'Où est toi, qui ne m'écoute?'"

"Yes. Quite certainly. Why do you ask?"

"Because I could suppose that the original text, badly typed, was: 'Ou es-tu, toi qui ne m'écoutes?'"

"Not at all! It doesn't mean that at all! But: 'Où est cette personne, toi, cette personne qui ne m'écoute pas?' So no *s* should be added to écoute."

This morning, my zeal is untimely. Claudel ratifies all the obscurities of his style while becoming astonished at my questions. I understand his insistence upon expressing himself in this way. But I do not dare to ask him the one question that should evoke the answer to all the others: "You, why do you not understand that people are astonished?"

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